



# Familial Feeling

Entangled Tonalities in  
Early Black Atlantic Writing and  
the Rise of the British Novel

Elahe Haschemi Yekani

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# CONTENTS

1	Introduction: Provincialising the Rise of the British Novel in the Transatlantic Public Sphere	1
Part I	1719–1807: Moral Sentiment and the Abolition of the Slave Trade	67
2	Foundations: Defoe and Equiano	69
3	Digressions: Sancho and Sterne	123
Part II	1807–1857: Social Reform and the Rise of the New Imperialism	171
4	Resistances: Austen and Wedderburn	173
5	Consolidations: Dickens and Seacole	223
6	Conclusion: Queer Modes of Empathy as an Ethics of the Archive	273
	Index	293



## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 4.1	Title Page of Robert Wedderburn's <i>The Horrors of Slavery</i> (London, 1824)	206
Fig. 5.1	Cartoon depicting Mary Seacole in <i>Punch</i> (London, 30 May 1857)	256
Fig. 6.1	Lubaina Himid, <i>Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service</i> , 2007 (installation photograph). (Courtesy Judges' Lodgings Museum, Lancashire County Council)	286
Fig. 6.2	(a and b) Lubaina Himid, <i>Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service</i> , 2007 (detail). Acrylic on found porcelain, variable dimensions. (Courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London. Photo: Andy Keate)	287



## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: Provincialising the Rise of the British Novel in the Transatlantic Public Sphere

When I began working on this book in 2011, the 2007 bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade still felt recent.<sup>1</sup> There were new films, exhibitions, and a plethora of events commemorating and reflecting Britain's involvement in this global system of injustice on a larger national scale. More than a decade after these events, the country appeared to have moved on being consumed by the internal fallout and ongoing tensions around Brexit. However, in 2020, the commemoration of enslavement again entered the public spotlight invigorated by the anti-racist protests in reaction to police violence in the United States and across the globe. More and more vocal groups like Black Lives Matter no longer accept the unchallenged adulation of slaveholders and those who profited from colonial exploitation in the form of statues and monuments. In Bristol protesters took matters into their own hands toppling the statue of Edward Colston and throwing it into the harbour. Similar acts can be witnessed worldwide. These demonstrations show how powerful cultural relics are in shaping notions of national belonging and how they continue to impact the devaluation of Black lives. This is why many believe such monuments should no longer have an uncontested place in the public sphere.

For the (now revived) debate on memorial culture and racism, the bicentenary of 2007 marked a turning point in Britain. In that context many politicians struggled to find the right tone to commemorate slavery and the transatlantic trade, specifically in relation to Britain's (historical and contemporary) self-understanding. Then Prime Minister Tony Blair

was criticised for not offering a proper apology by circumventing the word “sorry”, instead speaking only of “our deep sorrow”. It seemed easier for Blair to delegate the cruelties of slavery to the far-away shores of the Caribbean and focus more on the abolitionist campaign at home. He also avoided the topic of possible reparations by emphasising the “better times of today”, showing little understanding of the ongoing global economic repercussions that the trade in human beings and colonial exploitation in its aftermath have produced in the Global South.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the simplifying juxtaposition of the shameful slavers versus the noble abolitionists overlooks the fact that historically there was often a much subtler ameliorationist discourse at work which, while indeed becoming increasingly intolerant of chattel slavery during the eighteenth century, nonetheless dehumanised people of African descent. The tension of addressing Black agency and white benevolence is also palpable in The International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, opened in 2007.<sup>3</sup> The exhibition puts great emphasis on Black contributions to the fight against slavery and educates visitors not only about slavery but also about West African culture. The celebratory endpoint of the display is a so-called Black Achievers Wall. Visitors to the museum and the museum’s website are encouraged to interact with the exhibit by suggesting additions to the wall, be it “a sports person, a writer, an activist, a television personality—anyone just as long as they are inspirational”.<sup>4</sup> Yet outside the museum, more recently, the achievements of Black British inhabitants were once more violently overlooked. In April 2018, Theresa May was criticised heavily for the way in which children of the so-called Windrush generation, Caribbean commonwealth migrants who legally entered the country after World War II, had been targeted by immigration authorities. Several people, whose documentation did not meet official criteria through no fault of their own, were threatened with or actually deported, despite having lived in Britain for more than fifty years. In addition to Home Secretary Amber Rush having to ultimately resign, this scandal also forced the then Prime Minister to issue an apology that emphasised the valuable contribution of the Windrush generation and their rightful place in the United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> This discourse, in turn, seemed to rely heavily on conceptions of the “good migrant” who is never simply accepted as belonging and worthy of the protection of the nation state *per se* but continuously has to prove their “worth”.

I am using these three seemingly divergent examples—Blair’s failed apology for Britain’s involvement in the slave trade, the celebratory “Black Achievers Wall” in The International Slavery Museum, and May’s

government's eventual attempts to appease in the so-called Windrush generation controversy by evoking the image of the "good migrant"—as entry points into my study of the literary archive of writing which made Blackness discursively compatible with Britishness. I want to show that the terms, the different tones, employed in shaping national belonging in canonical literary fiction and in the first written documents by Black Atlantic authors, a discourse that I describe as "familial feeling" in this book, have always relied on transnational entanglements. Individual words like "sorry" but also "inspirational", which figure prominently in the three short contemporary vignettes, demonstrate that the way Blackness and Britishness are interrelated is also a matter of tone.

Consequently, despite the prominence of the Windrush generation, entanglements between British and other cultures are not only the result of the migration following World War II but begin much earlier. The formation of the British nation in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was inextricably linked to the transatlantic economy and slavery in the Americas. The concomitant financial gain bolstered modern Great Britain's status as the most important imperial power of the time (cf. Walvin 2007: 8). However, within this formation slavery was not an uncontested status quo. The controversial public discourse ranged from the unapologetic pro-slavery plantocracy to the, often Evangelical, abolitionists, and positions in-between. While Britain's financial wealth still depended significantly on the slave trade, the campaign for abolition also became an unprecedented media success (cf. Wood 2002: 9). Gaining momentum in the late 1780s, the debate on the abolition of the slave trade was influential for the British enlightenment and the emergence of the middle class. Accordingly, in this book I look back at the historical archive of English literature, specifically at narrative texts by Black transatlantic authors and canonical British writers from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century to discuss how ideas of familiarity, of becoming part of the nation, were navigated by variously positioned subjects. In the two main sections of this study, I trace a shift in discourses on familial feeling, from the eighteenth-century emphasis on moral sentiment and sentimentalism as the predominant mode in fiction to social reform and realism that was to become characteristic of Victorian writing. This also changed public discourse from focusing on abolition and the aftermath of slavery in the Caribbean to a reinvention of the British empire and its enlightened New Imperialism that was no longer built on enslaved labour but territorial expansion in Asia and Africa. It was in competition with several European

powers in the second half of the nineteenth century when the British empire had, in fact, reached its greatest extent. Thus, the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the Indian Rebellion of 1857 are indicators of discursive turning points in these debates that mark the end dates of the two sections in this book.

This particular spatio-temporal framework of *Familial Feeling*, I argue, also promotes a reassessment of the so-called rise of the (British)<sup>6</sup> novel account that has been variously discussed ever since Ian Watt's eponymous path-breaking study in 1957. Reframed here as a story of entangled tonalities, considering both the generic aesthetic ideals underlying the novel form, understood first and foremost as prose writing that depicts realistic affective individualism, and notions of Englishness and Britishness as products of transatlantic negotiation. The rise of the novel can thus be related to a process by which modern Britishness is consolidated as inclusive of the formerly enslaved in the eighteenth century. This, however, gives way to greater colonial ambitions in the course of the nineteenth century. Accordingly, the novel form of writing prose that emerged in the eighteenth century and became more established in the nineteenth century modified the registers of how readers thought about families and belonging and who was included in communities of the familiar. In order to grasp these modified registers of familiarity in this book, I will discuss four different tonalities in the work of eight authors that shaped conceptions of the human in relation to the debates around British national identity, the abolition of slavery, and the emergence of the British empire, beginning with the *foundational* tone of Daniel Defoe and Olaudah Equiano, followed by the *digressive* tone of Ignatius Sancho and Laurence Sterne and the *resisting* tonality of Jane Austen and Robert Wedderburn and finally the *consolidating* tone of Charles Dickens and Mary Seacole. Literary scholar Sianne Ngai employs the concept of tone as a way "to account for the affective dimension of literature" (2007: 44), to bridge formal and political analysis of literary discourse, and I will return to this idea in explaining entangled tonalities in greater detail.

This project is admittedly ambitious. It operates on at least three different but interrelated levels. In concert with more recent approaches in the historiography of the British empire, I firstly hope to foster a view of British literature as part of a global network that can only be told as a story of entangled modernities. Such a temporal framing stands in contrast to the strong focus on the late nineteenth and twentieth century in postcolonial studies and the model of "writing back". Traditionally, English studies

of the novel, on the one hand, concentrate on the aesthetic and narrative development of the genre or, owing to Edward Said's interventions that I discuss in greater detail in the chapter on Austen and Wedderburn, examine colonial influences on canonical sources (or, as a third independent branch of research, analyse the "new" global Anglophone literatures in the former colonies). In this study however, the literature of marginalised subjects is not to be simply added to the established canon. Rather, the focus is on the simultaneous and intertwined marginalised and hegemonic claim to literature as a transatlantic sphere of subjectification. Literature therefore functions as the medium of middle-class self-assertion *and* of the emotive access to subject status by those who have been excluded from the realm of the human, the "family of man", or, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has famously phrased it, "The slave wrote not primarily to demonstrate humane letters, but to demonstrate his or her own membership in the human community" (1988: 128). Simon Gikandi likewise argues: "culture became the most obvious form of social mobility and self-making in the century that invented the modern individual" (2011: 55).<sup>7</sup> In his comprehensive study on *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* Gikandi elaborates:

In Britain as elsewhere in Europe, the promotion of a culture of sense and sensibility, of politeness and conduct operated as if the problem of enslavement belonged to distant reaches of empire far away from the domestic scene in which new identities were being constructed. (2011: 90)

While the "humanising" function of literature that Gates and Gikandi describe seems immediately convincing, we should also direct more attention to the fact that the early Black Atlantic authors *also* engaged in aesthetically challenging forms thereby altering writing conventions and the tonality of Britishness. Thus, my transnational mapping of the rise of the British novel specifically concentrates on the ideal of the middle-class family and registers of familial feeling.

Hence, secondly, the title of the book, *Familial Feeling*, is explored, in Raymond Williams's terms, as a "structure of feeling" that organises and, on a more methodological level, challenges questions of empathy and reading/writing in relation to processes of inclusion and exclusion. The act of reading as empathic identification with someone else—accelerated by the technological revolutions, increased literacy, and faster distribution at the time—becomes crucial for the emotional register of the middle

class. I aim to interrogate how this formation was always reliant on interaction with Others and cannot be framed as a linear progress narrative.<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly and finally, on a methodological level, my goal is to bring into dialogue the mainly separated spheres of (postclassical) approaches in (transatlantic) narrative studies, addressing aesthetic dimensions of literary tone and narrative identity formation, with those strands of affect theory that emphasise the political mobilisation of affect and (often negative) feeling, prevalent in postcolonial and queer theory as well as in African American studies, which I take up in more detail in the conclusion, dealing with contemporary memorial culture and the ethics of engaging with the archive of slavery. I thus advocate a continued permeability for cultural studies perspectives in literary studies instead of a re-canonisation in national literary studies.

Bringing into conjunction these diverse perspectives on familial feelings of Britishness, I argue, helps to systematically resituate the well-known texts by Defoe, Sterne, Austen, and Dickens and defamiliarise the established understanding of the rise of the novel. The similarities in political bearing and aesthetic choices, the entangled tonalities, regarding the topics of slavery and colonialism between the canonical authors and sources written by those whose lives have been shaped by transatlantic crossings, such as Equiano, Sancho, Wedderburn, and Seacole, are not considered extraordinary or in binary opposition, but rather part and parcel of the very rise of Britishness and its narratives. These texts are read side by side as part of a larger “family history”; together they construct, circumvent, contest, and consolidate the narrations of modern nation states and the emergence of a British literary canon. Before expanding on these ideas in the literary readings in the following four chapters, I will provide a more systematic historical and methodological contextualisation for the underlying premises of this book. For the remainder of this introduction, I first explain in greater detail what I call “familial feeling” in relation to the intertwined histories of modernity and slavery. I then discuss how this idea can be linked to and help reframe the “rise of the novel” account and finally suggest looking for “entangled tonalities” as a way to capture the dynamics between the British novel and early Black Atlantic writing.

## FAMILIAL FEELING

“The word ‘family’ can be used to mean many things, from the conjugal pair to the ‘family of man’”, writes historian Lawrence Stone (1977: 21) in his classical substantial account of the modernisation of family life, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800*. It is specifically this flexibility of the term family which covers both the micro structure of societies as domestic units within one household as well as a much larger conception of belonging to the human race in general that I wish to evoke in the phrase “familial feeling”.<sup>9</sup> It purposely echoes the expression “familiar feeling” because the family, despite the vagueness of the concept itself, is referenced time and again as the locus of supposedly self-evident commonality. No social sphere, it seems, is as saturated with affects and regimes of feeling as kinship structures. They organise emotional belonging as well as social intelligibility and the accumulation of wealth. They are *familiar* to all of us.

Concurrent with Stone’s family history in 1977, Raymond Williams, one of the founding figures of British cultural studies, considered the affective importance of cultural artefacts as part of a “structure of feeling”. In contrast to the more static concept of ideology, Williams emphasises the emotional dimension in the emergence and shifts of social norms. This is his well-known definition:

We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a “structure”: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. [...] The idea of a structure of feeling can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions [...] which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming. (1985 [1977]: 132–133)

These structures in turn can “support, elaborate, and consolidate the practice of empire” and affect coloniser and colonised as postcolonial critic Edward Said (1994: 14) has argued. Hence, the realm of what feels familiar is to a large degree reliant on how emotional belonging is imagined in art and literature. Familial feeling in this book then refers to the ways in which “the family” and “familiarity” are overlapping spheres. This is also one of the reasons why the notion of the family is especially attractive for



those excluded from the realm of the human as a means to claim inclusion into both the larger “family of man” and the micro level of the nuclear family. The family is where the demarcation between self and Other is challenged. The Caribbean plantation, for instance, becomes the physical space in which interracial sexualised violence alters notions of who belongs to Britain. This debate will be addressed in the chapter on Austen and Wedderburn.

Stone describes in greater detail the processes that led to the modern family unit becoming the predominant form of living together in Europe. He recounts this development as a change from what he calls the “restricted patriarchal nuclear family” to the “closed domesticated nuclear family” which in Britain evolved in the late seventeenth century and predominated in the eighteenth. “This was the decisive shift, for this new type of family was the product of the rise of Affective Individualism. It was a family organized around the principle of personal autonomy, and bound together by strong affective ties” (1977: 7). In more than one respect, Britain pioneered the development of this middle-class family ideal. Earlier than in any other European state the so-called industrial revolution (and the concomitant urbanisation) gave rise to smaller family units and a rigid class system, as Friedrich Engels (2010 [1884]) outlined not by coincidence in relation to England in 1884 in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.<sup>10</sup> The modern individual then is conceptualised as autonomous and social at the same time.

So, while the nuclear (bourgeois) family can be understood as the epitome of modern belonging, it also becomes increasingly regulatory with respect to gendered, racialised, and sexualised norms, as Michel Foucault (1998 [1976]) has famously delineated in what he called the shift from the “deployment of alliance” to the “deployment of sexuality”, which from the eighteenth century onward complemented the former.<sup>11</sup> This creates ambivalence in the sense that the family can be considered to be both inclusionary and exclusionary. Metaphorically, the variously gendered family relations are extended to the very state itself in phrases such as “fatherland” or the “mother country”.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the conception of modern nation states as “imagined communities” in the eighteenth century superseded earlier systems of religious community and dynastic realm, as Benedict Anderson has described in his well-known work of the same name. Anderson stresses the importance of newspapers and novels, or more generally “print-capitalism” in this process (1991: 9–36; cf. also Bhabha 1990).<sup>13</sup> Consequently, constructions of familial feeling and the

rise of print culture need to be considered in unison to understand the shifts from the debate on abolition in the eighteenth century to colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. These modifications of regimes of familial feeling, I argue, can be described as gradual changes in emphasis from moral sentiment to social reform and from sympathy to charity.

In *The Navigation of Feeling*, William Reddy explains:

Scholars working on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [...] have begun to trace out the rise and fall of an emotional revolution of the past, called “sentimentalism,” or the “cult of sensibility”—a loosely organized set of impulses that played a role in cultural currents as diverse as Methodism, antislavery agitation, the rise of the novel, the French Revolution (including the Terror), and the birth of Romanticism. (2001: x)

The modern emphasis on sentimental feeling seems connected from the outset to both literary aesthetic developments (the rise of the novel, Romanticism) and political upheaval (anti-slavery agitation and the French Revolution/terror). In this understanding, literature tests the limits of acceptable subjects and objects of emotional attachment. Some examples of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, specifically novels like Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (2009 [1771]), draw a fair amount of ridicule regarding the many tears shed on their pages already from contemporary readers and even more so from later Victorian writers (cf. Todd 1986: 141–146).<sup>14</sup> By now there is a well-established field of scholarship that deals specifically with sentimental fiction and slavery/abolition. Especially noteworthy in the British context are Markman Ellis’s *The Politics of Sensibility. Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (1996), Brycchan Carey’s *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility* (2005), Lynn Festa’s *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (2006) as well as Ramesh Mallipeddi’s *Spectacular Suffering. Witnessing Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic* (2016).<sup>15</sup> These studies are valuable foundations for my readings, which I hope to complement by emphasising global entanglements and by discussing how the sentimental rhetoric extends into a longer history of the familiar/self as well as the strange/Other in Victorian fiction (and eventually even into contemporary efforts to commemorate the abolition of slavery in Britain).

So rather than focus exclusively on the mode of literary sentimentalism, I am more interested in how the selected writers shift the tone of

representing self and Other in varying familial registers. Beginning with the foundational tone of claiming the status of a self-reflexive modern subject in Defoe and Equiano's writings, I then juxtapose the already playful mocking and digressive style of the sentimental men of letters Sancho and Sterne. Increasingly, familial feeling includes notions of terror and unrespectability in the aftermath of the terror of the 1790s and the abolition of the slave trade in the Caribbean, which Wedderburn's writings that I read with Austen's *Mansfield Park* represent. We again witness a more pronounced demarcation of Britishness in relation to both the United States and the colonies in the Victorian writing of Dickens and Seacole which can be characterised as consolidating the new imperial ambitions of the nation. So, while I do look at the "development" of novelistic writing, I aim to do so by focusing on transnational interaction as well as challenging the narrative of liberal progress.

Regarding the very concept and term enlightenment, historian Sebastian Conrad suggests that "it is less instructive to search for alleged origins—European or otherwise—than to focus on the global conditions and interactions in which the 'Enlightenment' emerged" (2012: 1009) and proposes to pursue a "long history of Enlightenment" (2012: 1015). He argues:

[T]hinking in stages was one of the ways in which eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers translated cultural difference into a language of progress. But while this idea coexisted with other notions of being "enlightened"—the progress of reason, the public sphere, secular world views—by the late nineteenth century, Enlightenment was increasingly inserted into a narrative of evolutionism and the advance of civilization. It was thus transformed from a process into a currency—some had more of it, and some needed tutors to give it to them. (2012: 1019)

In line with more and more eighteenth-century studies scholars, like Srinivas Aravamudan (1999) and Felicity Nussbaum (2005), Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa also critique a uniform understanding of Enlightenment (writ large) "into a kind of shorthand notation for a group of familiar abstractions: rationalism, universalism, equality, human rights, and science" (2009: 11) and in the introduction to their edited volume *The Postcolonial Enlightenment* call on literary critics to "make both centre and periphery plural" to "recognize multiple points of entry into discourses of Enlightenment as well as the possibility of alternative genealogies and

teleologies” (2009: 24). Such an extension of the postcolonial framework to include the rise of modernity already in the eighteenth century helps bring into closer focus the entanglement of modernity with transatlantic slavery and colonialism, to divert “the otherwise frictionless circulation of the eighteenth century to itself as Eurocentric romance” (Aravamudan 1999: 329). Following these thinkers, I want to trace a “long history” of familial feeling in relation to the rise of the British novel. Hence, the two sections, demarcating writing before and after the 1807 British abolition of the slave trade, should not be understood as standing in stark opposition or marking a linear progress narrative but rather be aligned with Conrad’s account of an enlightenment continuum. As part of this process, novelistic conventions also take stronger hold.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, we can observe a modification from sentimental to domestic fiction,<sup>17</sup> which becomes reliant, again in Conrad’s terms, gradually on a nationalistic “narrative of evolutionism and the advance of civilization”.<sup>18</sup>

Let me contextualise these literary developments further in relation to the history of the slave trade. Obviously, it is predominantly work coming out of the academic discipline of history that has offered productive attempts to read European history as always already in relation to colonialism and the triangular slave trade. These approaches are linked to labels such as connected or entangled histories as well as *histoire croisée* and transatlantic<sup>19</sup> history or modernism (cf. Beckles 1997; Conrad 2012; Conrad et al. 2013; Werner and Zimmermann 2006).<sup>20</sup> Given the limited first-hand accounts of the colonised and enslaved, however, alternative methodologies come into play in these historiographic accounts.<sup>21</sup> One angle is the attempt to write counter-histories, often incorporating fictional sources. In their influential transatlantic “history from below” *The Many-Headed Hydra*, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, for instance, reconstruct the “lost history” of a “multiethnic class” (cf. 2000: 6) focusing on rebellious inter-racial alliances. In a similar but differently framed attempt, linking eighteenth-century accounts of slavery to more contemporary history and what he calls “the long twentieth century” Ian Baucom (2005: 17) discusses the *Zong* massacre<sup>22</sup> and the numerous ways in which this history and the spectre of the dead still “haunt” modern capitalist societies. Given the many fictionalised versions of the event, including J.M.W. Turner’s 1840 painting “Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhoon coming on” (later simply called “The Slave Ship”), he too turns to artistic imagination in his *Specters of the Atlantic*.<sup>23</sup> One way to reconstruct transatlantic history then is the recourse to neglected

sources, trying to “give voice” to the marginalised. However, both these important historical interventions remain committed to a project of *counter* rather than truly entangled histories which would, I argue, also account for more uncomfortable aspects of collusion, for instance.

Susan Buck-Morss’ equally influential *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* is one of the most persuasive interventions into the intellectual history of the West to date precisely because she highlights the reciprocity of the West and “the rest” in ways that I would see more closely aligned with an entangled understanding of European modernity (rather than a counter-history). She investigates how enlightenment thought coincides with the systematic mass subjugation of human beings and calls slavery the “root metaphor of Western political philosophy” (2009: 21). Buck-Morss focuses on German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his potential knowledge of the Haitian Revolution interlinking this uprising with the French Revolution, to “consider Haiti not as the victim of Europe, but as an agent in Europe’s construction” (2009: 80). Also taking Hegel’s philosophy as a starting point, Paul Gilroy’s widely applied concept of the *Black Atlantic*<sup>24</sup> (1993) still offers one of the most fruitful points of departure in theorising modern subjectivity in relation to the violence of transatlantic enslavement and influences my framing of Black writing as integral to the foundation of British conceptions of self and Other. Gilroy criticises Hegel’s “dialectic of intersubjective dependency and recognition” (Gilroy 1993: 68).<sup>25</sup> The Hegelian slave, or bondsman to be more precise, prefers bondage rather than death (cf. Hegel 1970 [1807]: 113–120). In narratives of real slavery, however, “positive preference for death rather than continued servitude” undermines Hegel’s allegory (Gilroy 1993: 68), apparent in texts like Equiano’s narrative, a notion to which I will come back in greater detail in my reading. In such a global understanding of the history of modernity then the metaphors of bondage/slavery and Europe’s emancipation into an enlightened state clash violently with the material reality of chattel slavery. At a time when the so-called enlightened subject is finding its voice, legally enslaved people were not “inferior subjects” but “a special kind of property” (Gikandi 2011: 91). By turning to entanglement, I want to emphasise the very paradoxes of European modernity that is violently exclusionary but also becomes a space of potential or imaginary radical inclusivity.

In Britain, slavery fuelled middle-class financial wealth, the rise of the banks, especially in port cities like Liverpool and Bristol, while chattel slavery was safely pushed out of sight, as historian James Walvin argues:

For more than a century and a half, from the founding of British Caribbean slavery, the British had enjoyed the expanding wealth of their slave colonies without troubling themselves too much about the inhumanities and immoralities which underpinned the system. (2007: 99)

This ignorance towards the realities of chattel slavery also influenced how Black people were perceived at the time. In her popular historical study *Black London: Life before Emancipation*, Gretchen Gerzina estimates that by 1768 around 15,000 Black people lived in London (with a total population of about 676,250) (1995: 5). However, Black British subjects—even if in servitude—were often more fashionable “house servants” rather than slaves. Other members of the predominantly male population worked as musicians and sailors, and occasionally African royalty was sent to be educated abroad.<sup>26</sup> Hence, while there is a growing visible Black presence in Britain, the eventually scandalised “horrors of slavery” are connected primarily to the Americas, not to British soil in the public imagination.

Despite these distancing mechanisms regarding the day-to-day realities of slavery, there is growing awareness of and public debate on the crass incongruity of the philosophical ideals of enlightenment thinking and the lived reality of slavery which does not remain unchallenged in the second half of the eighteenth century, neither in the colonies (as the history of slave uprisings, such as Tacky’s Rebellion in Jamaica in 1760, underlines), nor in Britain. It is interesting to note, however, that in the West, it is not the rational secularised elite but often members of the dissenting Protestant sects and Evangelicals who became active first in the fight to end slavery (cf. Sandiford 1988: 52). Accordingly, there is a twenty-year period of campaigning for the abolition of the slave trade beginning in the 1790s when William Wilberforce brought several unsuccessful petitions before Parliament.<sup>27</sup> In this context, literary texts contributed the dimension of feeling as one important indicator of modern subjectivity—to feel pain and to empathise with others become crucial for the notion of the enlightened subject and eventually for the abolitionist campaign.

Nonetheless, what exactly led to the eventual abolition of slavery in Britain is disputed among historians today. Walvin (2007: 99, 106–123), for instance, links the success of the British campaign for abolition to the rise of free trade, which promised to be more successful financially than the more and more risky triangular slave trade, rather than interpreting it as a moral triumph of the abolitionists (cf. also Brown 2006).<sup>28</sup> Charlotte Sussman (2000), too, emphasises economic motives for the increasing

British criticism of the slave trade.<sup>29</sup> But the changing public discourse cannot be linked to economic factors solely.

Legally, one important milestone in the fight for abolition was, as widely noted, the Somerset case of 1772 which preceded the mentioned infamous 1781 first *Zong* case. The degradation of human beings to property was challenged when the fugitive slave James Somerset won his case put forward by Granville Sharp before the Chief Justice, William Murray, First Earl of Mansfield and—being granted a writ of *habeas corpus*—could not be re-sold into West Indian slavery since he had already entered British soil (cf. e.g. B. Carey 2005: 175; Sandiford 1988: 66).<sup>30</sup> This is seen by many as the beginning of Britain’s paradoxical exceptional standing on outlawing slavery at home while still profiting financially from its plantations abroad for at least the following sixty years (cf. Swaminathan 2009: 86–100). Buck-Morss argues that a distinct spatial ordering is at work here. “The Somerset case defined slavery as essentially ‘un-British,’ an ‘alien intrusion’ which could be tolerated at best, as an unfortunate part of the commercial and colonial ‘other-world’” (2009: 92). Despite the growing bleak working conditions in urban factories, Britain was demarcated as the “free world” (2009: 100) and Buck-Morss classifies the factory as an “extension of the colonial system” at home (2009: 102). This underscores how the domestic and the colonial sphere interact, continuously rivalling for public attention—a concern in almost all the literary texts discussed, especially in Dickens’s later Victorian writing.

These trials about the “human” status of the enslaved predate the legal battle for women’s suffrage. Nevertheless, one can also detect connections that continue well into the nineteenth century as I will lay out. Here, too, we see that despite the fundamental subjugation of women, enlightenment discourse extended a paradoxical promise of inclusivity. While women were far from enjoying equal rights, upper and middle-class white women received more access to the political sphere in the eighteenth century. In the colonies, many white women participated in forms of domination—often being able to exercise such power for the first time. Others, in turn, expressed political agency by lobbying for the abolition of slavery (while being denied the status as citizens in Britain) (cf. Ferguson 1992; Woodard 1999: 68). But regardless of white women’s visible commitment to abolition, this political dedication was often not automatically sutured to the feminist demands of women’s suffrage which, despite the 1792 publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft (1992 [1792]), only gained momentum at the turn of the nineteenth to

the twentieth century. Quite on the contrary, many (Evangelical) female abolitionists opposed the more radical demand for women's rights and emphasised women's role as virtuous helpmeets of their husbands. Abolitionist poet Hannah More, for example, expressed moral outrage over the lewd and unchristian behaviour in the colonies that threatened notions of modesty (cf. Ferguson 1992: 9, 146–147). The fact that the male British planter class produced offspring with enslaved women challenged not only boundaries of Christian morality, it also led to constellations in which the father literally and legally became the “owner” of his children, a taboo that is hinted at in Austen's text and explicit in Wedderburn's recalcitrant letters to his Scottish family.

While the emerging nineteenth-century discourse of scientific racism turns this into a narrative of threatening “contamination” of the “English race”, eighteenth-century abolitionist discourse relies more strongly on a supposed female sensibility that can extend into the plantocracy in the Caribbean and thereby help keep “order” in the British domestic sphere. Sussman explains this in the following terms:

In abolitionist pamphlets, [...] active female virtue is conjoined to a kind of national sensibility, a female anxiety [...]. The compassion of British women symbolizes a specific national identity—a quality that distinguishes England from the rest of the world. [...] Abolitionist rhetoric thus consciously calls on female sensibility to safeguard the home from colonial contamination, to preserve that home as a symbol of a purified English identity, and thus to ensure that the domestic sphere remains distinct from the colonial arena. (2000: 126)

Thus, the “progressive” politics of white female abolitionists also fed into moral conceptions of national purity imagined as increasingly endangered in Britain's colonial involvement. Abolitionist writing (which included texts by Black and white authors) therefore should be contextualised as a highly ambivalent political project. Building on these historical and political analyses my interest is specifically in how these discourses shaped the aesthetic tonalities of creating familial feeling in prose narratives of the time, which, in turn, need to be sutured to the larger philosophical debate on feeling and sentiment.

In relation to the eighteenth-century moral philosophy of the so-called Scottish enlightenment thinkers the concept of sympathy is central. Helga Schwalm underlines the double meaning of sympathy as a communication



of sentiments (feeling) and sentiments as the moral foundation of understanding an “Other” (cf. Schwalm 2007: 18; cf. also Neumann and Schmidt-Haberkamp 2015). It is specifically Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that is relevant in this context as he proposes sympathy as a process of imagining ourselves as others, which he calls “fellow-feeling” (2009 [1759]: 14). Ellis further explains: “Smith’s account of sympathy has the logic of Burke’s sublime, in that there is a fundamental discontinuity between the quality of feeling of the viewer and the sufferer of pain or fear” (1996: 13). As a result, in literature, we can observe a proliferation of sentimental and tearful displays of pity and compassion, both aspects of sympathy in Smith’s understanding, which goes hand in hand with a growth and the increasing institutionalisation of philanthropy (cf. Ellis 1996: 14). Similarly, Brycchan Carey argues that the discourses of abolition and sentimentality have shaped a specific “sentimental rhetoric” whereby sympathy is understood as a means to shed light on suffering (2005: 2).

Abolitionist discourse therefore scandalised the bodily and emotional anguish of enslaved Africans as a means to generate momentum against the slave trade (which was, we must remember, not palpably present in the daily lives of many Britons, even those who held considerable financial interests in Caribbean plantations). As Simon Strick (2014) has argued, the very capacity to feel pain became a form of cultural capital that enslaved Africans supposedly lacked altogether. The enslaved were reduced to mere bodies, which turned them into the “ideal” workforce for the hard labour on the plantations. Hence, the emphasis on the physical pain of slaves, on cruel bodily punishments and mutilations, as well as the severe emotional scarring that the severing of family ties caused, functions as both an “appeal to common humanity” and “evidence of the capabilities of Africans” (Innes 2002: 17); and in this endeavour “new literary forms and new narrative and poetic techniques emerged” as Lyn Innes (2002: 4) argues. Sympathy is thus interrelated with the arts and the power to imagine oneself in the position of another, which longer prose fiction and the novel specifically catered to. Ellis accordingly links the rise of sentimental fiction and the political debate on the abolition of slavery aesthetically.<sup>31</sup> He argues,

The paradox of sentimentalism, simply stated, is that these novels are the site of considerable political debate and that this is so despite and because of the extraordinary texture of the novels, with their focus on romantic-love plots,

their devotion to the passions and the rhetoric of tears and blushes, and their fragmentary and digressive narrative. (1996: 4)

In other words, while the emotionalising and digressive style of sentimental fiction<sup>32</sup> seems at first glance at odds with the highly politicised and serious topics these texts address (cf. Festa 2006: 2), the depictions of suffering and sympathetic feeling are related. Indeed, there is a specific eighteenth-century aesthetic indulgence played out in sentimental fiction that can be understood as a means to establish oneself as a particularly emotionally sophisticated subject (cf. also Keymer 2005). This aspect will come under closer scrutiny in the chapter on Sterne and Sancho who communicate, despite their very different positionalities, similarly as sentimental men of letters. Accordingly, Ellis states, “Reading sentimental fiction, then, was to be an improving experience, refining the manners by exercising the ability to feel for others” (1996: 17). This then gestures towards the paradox of sympathy as reproducing regulating mechanisms in its reliance on objects of pathos and the spectacle of the suffering slave, as Amit Rai (2002: xi) argues in his book *Rule of Sympathy*.<sup>33</sup> He explains:

[I]n the colonial ordering of the West Indies and India, paternalism as a model, the family as an object, and “domestic affection” as an instrument were all central to the practices of governing populations. [...] Sympathy was both a model and instrument of governmentality. (Rai 2002: 8–9)

Put differently, in the discourse on sympathy, those aspects that Stone considers foundational of modern family relations and which he calls affective individualism can go hand in hand with a Foucauldian notion of governmentality that increasingly understands colonial relations as family relations. Again, Rai’s explications are helpful:

[F]or eighteenth-century moral philosophers, the family was the preeminent work space for the functioning of sympathy. As it became a vehicle for new pedagogies of control and the elaboration of citizenship [...]: The sympathetic relation, as the first of all domestic affections, became a model and an instrument for a newly atomizing class-society and a rapidly consolidating empire. Finally, the metaphor of family also became part of counter-discourses, critiques, and strategic displacements. (2002: 35)

As a result, current scholarship is critical of the conflation of sentimentalism with progressive humanitarianism (cf. Boulukos 2013) and highlights

questions of paternalism but also counter-hegemonic agency.<sup>34</sup> The most famous and central visual representation of this paradoxical effect of sympathy is the sentimental emotionalising image of the kneeling shackled slave on the Wedgwood medallion of the British Anti-Slavery Society, pleading “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?”, which became a popular embellishment of crockery and was worn as a fashion accessory by women who supported abolition (cf. Dabydeen 2011; Festa 2006: 164–171). On the one hand, it depicts a subservient man in need of help. On the other hand, this Black man becomes part of the “family of man” for the first time (and later a female equivalent was produced, too). From a contemporary perspective, this image is criticised precisely because such representations cater to a supposedly enlightened benevolent white audience and hardly leave room for Black agency. Festa fittingly calls this a “trope of redundant personification” since it “recreates the humanity of someone who is already human” and therefore “exposes the way sentimental personification dehumanizes the very figure it animates” (2006: 12) while simultaneously bestowing “affective distinction” (2006: 187) to those who express sympathy. The humanity of the enslaved is not taken for granted; it becomes the subservient question addressed to a benevolent audience that has the power to include or exclude the objects of its sympathy into the realm of the familiar.

With increasing fears of the more radical terror of the revolutionary uprisings at the end of the eighteenth century, abolitionist discourse showed docile slaves who patiently waited (or begged) to be freed by their masters rather than engage in more violent protest against slavery which was a common reality in the Caribbean slave revolts. In this sense, these images actually produce overlap with some of the assumptions around the figuration of the “grateful slave” that George Boulukos has analysed comprehensively, and which originated in pro-slavery publications. Unthreatening sentimentalised accounts of slavery promoted a more moderate form of amelioration rather than abolitionist discourse that cannot simply be separated into politically progressive versus conservative: Amelioration became a “‘moderate’ [...] middle ground claimed by both abolitionists and slave owners. Amelioration was attractive to plantation owners not only because it imagined slaves happily embracing their slavery, but also because it staved off a public demand for emancipation” (Boulukos 2006: 362).<sup>35</sup> Boulukos thus identifies benevolence as the central marker of power that becomes prevalent first in pro-slavery and later abolitionist discourse (cf. 2008: 21). Importantly, the image of familial

care is evoked here once more in “the pro-slavery vision of a familial relationship between benevolent paternalist masters and faithful dependant slaves” (Boulukos 2008: 37). In a similar understanding, Festa argues that the “sentimental feeling self is thus the Janus face of the Enlightenment rational subject” (2006: 4). While eighteenth-century philosophical discourses on sympathy challenge the boundary between self and Other, the aesthetics of sentimentality, Festa contends, stabilises the dichotomy of the subjects and objects of feeling and by extension imperial aspirations (2006: 6–8).

Nevertheless, while sympathy elicits uncomfortable questions about the agency of the suffering Other, it is also a marker of social distinction as a feeling/sympathetic modern subject that increasingly Black writing subjects like Equiano and Sancho claim by employing this rhetoric themselves. In this way the adoption of such sentimental aesthetics then can also bear subversive potential and the representation of Black suffering remains ambivalent. In accordance, Sussman describes the oscillation between disgust and sentiment in eighteenth-century representations of colonial subjects as instants of possible disruption of hegemonic frameworks. She suggests “reading moments of uncontrollable affect not as monuments to the crushing power of a racist ideology, but as places where the balance of colonial power is revealed to be unstable” (2000: 17). Therefore, rather than focus straightforwardly on the political implications of sympathy overburdening the racialised body with affect, I will interrogate the ambivalent aesthetics of creating familiarity via sympathy not limited to the literary style of sentimentalism (which the scholars cited in this section have explored so fruitfully).

Barnes succinctly states that “sympathy is both the expression of familiarity and the vehicle through which familiarity is created” (Barnes 1997: 2). We can notice this idea already in Smith’s original conception of how sympathy works. He writes that “my imagination is more ductile, and more readily assumes [...] the shape and configuration of the imaginations of those with whom I am familiar” (2009 [1759]: 37). Familial feeling then is both inclusionary as well as exclusionary, as Barnes argues conclusively: “Whatever character(istic)s cannot be made to conform to the family image must remain excluded from sympathy, while those that are included must be represented in such a way that they prove familiar and thus identifiable” (1997: 97). However, Barnes, in general seems to over-emphasise the need for familiar similarity in objects of sympathy I would argue. First of all, the fact that a subject can sympathise with someone who

is clearly marked as different such as “the slave” shows a form of triumphant compassion that can help distinguish oneself from those who are less enlightened such as “the slaveowner” (often marked as unchristian). Thus, sympathy is a marker of distinction that gains relevance also in the growing transatlantic public sphere. One effect of the early phase of protest and the eventual success of the abolitionist campaign with the abolition of the slave trade in 1807<sup>36</sup> and the eventual passing of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 then was that it enabled the British to imagine themselves as *exceptionally* modern and progressive in their renunciation of slavery. Christopher Brown convincingly describes this as an investment in “moral capital” (2006) as a reaction to the American Revolution and the lost influence in the Americas. British abolitionism is set against the United States’ deplored holding on to the—as it was called then—“peculiar institution” of slavery which was abolished in the United States only some thirty years later with the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment at the close of the Civil War in 1865.<sup>37</sup>

Consequently, expressions of feeling can also promote a form of national demarcation that comes into play in Britain’s self-conception of moral superiority in relation to what is perceived as the United States’s belated abolition of slavery.<sup>38</sup> So, while there must be a certain kind of fraternal similarity, and here I agree with Barnes, as “man and brother” to evoke familial feeling, markers of difference between the subject and object of sympathy are never entirely elided. Especially in forms of rhetoric that emphasise a (British) moral exceptionalism in degree of emotional responsiveness, it serves to create familiarity but also hierarchical distinction from those who “feel” less. Britishness here becomes an attractive vessel to claim familiarity with the formerly enslaved who should not be reduced to passive objects in this discourse.

Accordingly, this supposed moral superiority also influenced the transatlantic reception of Britain and turned it into a centre of attraction for African American thinkers which prompts Elisa Tamarkin to speak of “Black Anglophilia”.<sup>39</sup> Tamarkin describes the travels of Black intellectuals such as Frederick Douglass and Samuel Ringgold Ward in the nineteenth century to the United Kingdom as comparable to the European *grand tour* of the male English elite in the eighteenth century (cf. Buzard 2002) and often a first step to claim the status of “citizen of the world” (Tamarkin 2002: 455, 460). The formerly enslaved cross the Atlantic in the reverse direction of their forbearers and, as Tamarkin (2002: 473) contends, thus champion a modern transnational cosmopolitan identity that understands

Britishness as culturally progressive.<sup>40</sup> The stylised sentimentality of the eighteenth century morphs into more realistic depictions of interiority and familial feeling that Black authors also partake in.

Historian John Tosh characterises the 1830s and 1840s in Britain as consolidating the ideal of the home as the site of emotional belonging. He writes, “The Victorian middle-class domestic unit represented the final and most decisive stage in the long process whereby the rationale of the Western family shifted from being primarily economic to become sentimental and emotional” (Tosh 1999: 13). In this process, the Victorian novel<sup>41</sup> is firmly established as the emotive vehicle for familial feeling:

Domesticity in this sense was essentially a nineteenth-century invention. One can go further and say that it was an integral aspect of modernity: socially it was inconceivable without large-scale urbanization; culturally it was one of the most important expressions of that awareness of individual interiority which had developed since the Enlightenment. Practised first and most intensively by the bourgeoisie, domesticity became the talisman of bourgeois culture, particularly in painting and novels. (Tosh 1999: 4)

In a similar vein, historian Ute Frevert speaks of the development of a “bürgerlichen Gefühlshabitus” (2011: 14). According to Frevert, the conception of this habitus of bourgeois emotion is reliant on the attribution of the “realness”/authenticity of feelings and sympathy (in contrast to the false feeling and pretence of the aristocracy that is sometimes associated with the literary style of sentimentalism) and the working classes and non-European societies who supposedly lacked feeling and refinement altogether (cf. 2011: 14). Sympathy and sensibility now become middle-class virtues. But Frevert to a certain degree reinstates these borders as fixed. Looking at early Black Atlantic writing, we see how those subjects who are supposedly excluded from these norms do cite them—even before they are fully recognised citizens. Modern subjectivity as the capacity to express “authentic” feeling in writing thus is highly contested in the transnational public sphere<sup>42</sup> I will argue.

While there are many consistencies and continuities with earlier eighteenth-century sentimentalism, increasingly the discourse shifts from a debate about who has the capacity to feel to begin with to a focus on refined emotionality as a form of class and civilisational distinction (much like the shift that Conrad identified in relation to the idea of enlightenment from process to currency). The question now no longer is *if* Africans

and their descendants are human (in the sense that they possess the same feelings as Europeans), now there is concern about *how* they should be governed as British colonial subjects (for instance, in relation to the question of African resettlement or the debate whether mixed-race subjects can be considered British). Consequently, hegemonic expressions of emotionality in the literary realm shift as well: We no longer read of the abundant tears and boundless expression of affection, but witness a display of controlled feeling that takes centre stage, as Gesa Stedman (2002) highlights.<sup>43</sup> This measured presentation of emotion was considered crucial for the emergence of the middle-class habitus in Victorian England. Stedman identifies “affection, feeling, emotion, passion, sensibility and sentiment” (2002: 25) as the most common “emotion words” in the nineteenth century. So, while there is not necessarily a radically new vocabulary of feeling, there is indeed a different emphasis on degree, which corresponds to the generic stabilisation of the novel<sup>44</sup> and the predominance of domestic fiction. This, in turn, can be connected to a reemphasis on gendered difference which the men of feeling had disrupted to a certain degree.

While women have always also managed family affairs, Nancy Armstrong describes the naturalisation of the gendered middle-class division of labour into the figurations of the new “domestic woman” versus the “economic man” (cf. 1987: 59). This gendered order however is less dependent on the supposedly separate private and public spheres, as Tosh (2004) contends, than on the distinction between citizens and non-citizens. He elaborates that middle-class men’s prerogative was not only the access to the public sphere, but also a distinctly male role of caretaker as a “man of character” (2004: 76, 197) within the realm of the private. These duties extended mainly to economically dependent women and children.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, rather than debate sympathy as a philosophical capacity, there is now increasing concern about who is worthy of sympathy as in the professionalisation of charities, which fosters a distinction between the “deserving” and “underserving” poor, for instance. In this way, the family becomes the locus of governmental control which Foucault (2008) famously described as “biopolitics”.

These ideas were also extended into the colonies where, as is much noted (for instance by Rai 2002), the supposedly “childlike” natives were conceptualised as requiring English “parental” guidance. In this way, progress and modernity become products of an ethos of familial care which requires those who are not (yet) modern. Thus, through colonial expansion and emigration, working-class men and women were included

more and more into the promise of (class) mobility since it was first and foremost the so-called surplus men and women (McClintock 1995: 238) who left England to “conquer” a bourgeois identity elsewhere. In accordance with this growing emphasis on rule abroad and self-regulation at home, the civilisational concerns with “family hygiene” and the threat of “racial purity” are also increasingly framed as a form of competition between the colonial sphere and the working class in Britain as was noted earlier.<sup>46</sup>

This courting public attention is thus not entirely new but a sign of the shifting discourse. Put forward initially by pro-slavery writers of the late eighteenth century who tried to divert attention away from the harsh working conditions of the enslaved in the Caribbean by suggesting that there was hardly any difference between the work on the plantations and the “sufferings of the British poor, in particular, miners and child chimney sweeps” (B. Carey 2005: 15), this playing off of one form of oppression against another returns with a vengeance in Victorian depictions of the working classes, as in the pitiful street urchin Jo in Dickens’s *Bleak House* which I discuss in my reading of the novel in Chap. 5. The “Chartist critique of ‘white slavery’ in England” (Rai 2002: 121) is reliant on symbolically black figures of neglected whiteness. However, interestingly, this construction now appears in “progressive” discourse, too.<sup>47</sup> So again, I am not suggesting a radical break between eighteenth-century sentimentalism and the nineteenth-century novel. Rather I am interested in a consolidation and suturing of ideas of belonging that are tied to notions of familiarity which is no longer philosophically framed only as “fellow-feeling” but displayed in modes of regulating those who belong to a specific national “imagined community”.

While the “authenticity” of Black authorship continues to be contested, the rise (or consolidation) of the novel, I argue, enabled marginalised subjects to claim different literary registers or tonalities of familiarity (as is to be argued in relation to Wedderburn’s resisting voice in contrast to Seacole’s more consolidating tone, for instance). Conversely, the novels of Austen and Dickens include references to slavery to both test and buttress notions of the British family. This is a more complicated Bakhtinian dialogue than radical versus conservative family narratives; the authors at the centre often emphasise the complicated gendered implications of the bourgeois novel (Austen and Dickens) while Black Atlantic authors sought to implement their position within the British family by constructing different Others (Seacole’s reference to colonial and US-American Others,



for example). Following the 1857 so-called Indian Mutiny, Britain drastically professionalises colonial ordering as familial control. I end my study with texts then which can be understood as pointing in the direction of a consolidation of colonial expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century when Britain enters the phase of the so-called New Imperialism (cf. Hobsbawm 1989; Swaminathan 2009: 217). Nonetheless, the gendered social order was never uncontested. The numerous efforts to reform inheritance and marriage law as well as resistances to colonial rule in the nineteenth century are results of these social processes that turned the family into the central modern social regulatory unit and arena of conflicting powers.<sup>48</sup> As laid out in this historical overview, the dissemination of feeling through print publications, in general, and the emplotment of national belonging in the ever more popular novel, in particular, evoked an inclusionary promise into a new form of familiarity that my title “familial feeling” alludes to. The readership of these texts also came to include populations outside the bourgeois metropolitan elite. This finally brings me to the link between familial feeling and the rise of the novel as a specific aesthetic development that is often told purely within a national framework and detached from the global historical and political developments I have presented so far.

For this purpose, let me return once more to family historian Lawrence Stone’s terms. Stone sees affect—or, in accordance with terminology used in affect theory<sup>49</sup> today, we would rather speak of feeling—less as the expression of a unique modern capacity of middle-class men and women, but as an effect of a media-specific form of communication that is closely related to the development of the novel. He writes,

There was rapidly growing emphasis on the novel, which itself evolved from a picaresque narrative of external adventures, like *Robinson Crusoe*, to an in-depth discussion of love, property and marriage, which were the dominant themes of the genre from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen. There was also a substantial increase in literacy and in the capacity to handle the language, especially by women. The question therefore arises whether what appears to be a growth of affect may in fact be no more than a growth in the capacity to express emotions on paper, stimulated by growing familiarity with writing and influenced by the reading of novels. (Stone 1977: 13)

Affect, or feeling, then is not simply given but is entangled with the conventionalising and increasingly complex linguistic representations of

introspection. On a textual level, feeling is generated when we “see through someone else’s eyes”.<sup>50</sup> The term focalization, according to Gérard Genette (1983 [1972]) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (2009), refers to this point of view of a text but also includes cognitive, emotive, and ideological orientations rather than just being an answer to the question “who sees?” in a narrative. The identification with Others thus is central to the novel form but, I would argue, cannot simply be understood as generating progressive empathy as discussed in relation to the governmental aspects of sympathy. The representation of subjectivity in writing and modes of identification are part of processes of inclusion and exclusion. We could say that early Black autobiographical accounts narratologically perform *avant la lettre* what W.E.B. Du Bois later called “double-consciousness”<sup>51</sup> in his “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (2008 [1903]: 8). The narratives present Black introspection to a predominantly white audience and in this process perform a reflection of what it means to be seen through the eyes of another; in this way, the texts also alter conceptions of modern subjectivity. Thus, if we understand modern subjectivity and slavery as intertwined phenomena, historically, philosophically, and aesthetically, and I believe we should, then we need to reconsider Ian Watt’s account of the rise of the novel from a transatlantic perspective.

### THE RISE OF THE NOVEL RECONSIDERED (AGAIN)

According to Watt’s sociological so-called triple-rise theory, England, as a result of the rise of modern industrial capitalism and the spread of Protestantism, develops a powerful, more and more literate middle-class literary market that gives birth to formal realism with the novel becoming the most popular narrative form departing from the older romance. No longer allegorical, but based on psychological insight of characters, the novel—usually published in serialised instalments and disseminated via circulating libraries—purportedly is the genre of the modern individual. Accordingly, Watt positions Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (2003 [1719]) prominently as the “first novel” (2000 [1957]: 74).<sup>52</sup> However, he also acknowledges the great demand for shorter printed materials such as newspapers and pamphlets. By now, Watt’s more than fifty-year-old account of how the novel “rose” to fame has attracted critiques, more nuanced revisions, and amendments as, compiled for instance, in the

instructive double edition of *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* “Reconsidering the Rise of the Novel” edited by David Blewett (2000).

In addition to the often-voiced male bias in Watt’s account which failed to seriously consider female writers in general (cf. Armstrong 1987) and Aphra Behn’s prose in particular (cf. Todd 2000), John Richetti criticises Watt’s “teleological bias” (1969: 2) in his “grand narrative”.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Michael McKeon contests the postulated homogeneity of earlier writing of the Reformation which arguably already shared many qualities of the novel, Watt’s over-emphasis on the impact of the urban middle class, which does not account for the ongoing authority of the aristocracy (especially in rural England), as well as the failure to adequately acknowledge the very different tones of eighteenth-century writing ranging from Defoe’s empiricism to Sterne’s parody (1985: 169–170).<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to Watt, scholars like Richetti (2012) and David Duff (2012) turn to the Continental tradition of novel criticism and highlight Georg Lukács’s and Mikhail Bakhtin’s contributions to the field, who both position the traditional epic as counterpart to the modern novel (rather than the romance as Watt does). In this understanding, *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (2003 [1605 and 1615]) is often considered the earliest European novel. Accordingly, departing further from a linear conception of how genres develop, Duff (2012), for instance, revisits Bakhtin’s concept of “novelization” (Bakhtin 1994: 6–7), which favours an intertextual aesthetic perspective and became influential for a more poststructuralist understanding of literature. Here the “newness” of the novel is seen as a self-reflexive distance from the epic. This line of critique has become a productive counter frame to what Lennard Davis calls Watt’s “applied knowledges”—“using philosophy, sociology, and formalism” to analyse the novel (Davis 2000: 490).

Hence, while I generally lean strongly towards a “Continental” post-structuralist understanding of literature (and I will come back to Bakhtin’s model of dialogicity and the concomitant polyphony of the novel (1994: 45–49) in my readings), one thing that remains convincing in Watt’s “applied” Anglo-American account to this day is the link between conceptions of the modern individual and writing (cf. McKeon 2000: 270). As McKeon states, “the novel is the quintessentially modern genre, deeply intertwined with the historicity of the modern period, of modernity itself” (2000: 254). While *The Rise of the Novel* certainly suffers from the mentioned “over-emphasis on the discontinuity with which the transition to modernity was achieved” (McKeon 2000: 274), the idea of “authentic”

modern forms of feeling is a relevant marker of the “novelty” of eighteenth-century writing and formative of enlightenment subjectivity as an agglomeration of modernity—granted that Watt’s timeline can easily be challenged as starting either too late, as McKeon and Richetti have it, or, too early, as Downie suggests and which thus ties in with postcolonial demands of less teleological progress narratives that should be extended to descriptions of aesthetic generic development. Watt defines as the generic characteristic of the novel the “truth to individual experience—individual experience which is always unique and therefore new” (2000 [1957]: 13). Nonetheless, eighteenth-century scholars like Hunter (2000: 234) also point out that the reading public for this “new” kind of introspective writing is actually more diverse than Watt’s term of the “middle class” suggests, which is really only a nineteenth-century formation. The emerging public sphere included readers from the higher and lower ranks of society.<sup>55</sup>

There is powerful history here of the expansion of reading as a phenomenon, of its diversified uses and possibilities, of why writers began to expand and define their horizons of possibility as they came to be aware of audiences and marketing sources previously unknown or non-existent. Watt does not get everything right about the particulars of expanded literacy, including its timing and class strata, but his sense of a deeply changed economy of information exchange has made a lot of subsequent work possible, including almost everything now gathered under the aegis of the history of the book and most good historical genre theory. (Hunter 2000: 231–232)

In this understanding, the emerging European middle class (or reading public in less class-specific terms) shapes a new form of public discourse, which philosopher Jürgen Habermas has famously described as a civic public (cf. 1991: 27).<sup>56</sup> This public sphere is closely linked to conceptions of the family unit: “The privatized individuals stepped out of the intimacy of their living rooms into the public sphere of the salon, but the one was strictly complementary to the other” (Habermas 1991: 45). For my purpose then another value of Watt’s account rather than a purely poststructuralist focus on intertextuality is to look at the material conditions that gave rise to this modern public—a public, which, I argue, needs to be framed as transatlantic from the moment of its emergence.

Consequently, one needs to take into consideration the presence of early Black literary voices, such as Equiano and Sancho, during the rise of European modernity in the eighteenth century. While both Watt (cf. 2000

[1957]: 51–52) and Habermas (cf. 1991: 18) acknowledge that the colonies are crucial for the development of the public sphere—Watt states that the new print culture reached almost the entire English-speaking world including Ireland and the plantations—they fail to frame this as a reciprocal relationship and focus almost exclusively on the metropole (which in some ways is telling the story of coffee house culture without the plantations where consumer goods such as sugar, cacao, and coffee were produced first by the enslaved and later by indentured labourers) (cf. Mintz 1986; Sandiford 2000; Sussman 2000: 110–129).

What seems indisputable then is that while the rise of the novel no longer holds true as an uncontested linear account of how the modern bourgeois novel came into being, it still offers many points of departure that can raise awareness of how modernity began to be told as a specific (global) story, as an account that modern men and women could aspire to. The preeminent role of literature in the growing (transatlantic) public sphere should therefore not be underestimated. It is no coincidence that in one of the most influential articles in the mentioned strand of historical research which emphasises global entanglements, “Provincializing Europe: Postcoloniality and the Critique of History” (1992), Dipesh Chakrabarty often references literature and specifically autobiography as a prominent arena in which conceptions of modernity were established and challenged.

Catherine Gallagher compellingly remarks that it is not necessarily factuality that is seen as a criterion to judge “realist” novels by but their *believability* and plausibility, which in fact privileges emotional investment in fictional characters rather than *real* stories (cf. 2006: 346). Therefore my reading of testimonies, letters, travel writings, and novels next to each other also underscores that “the novel” is not the sole “literary” genre that helped bring about this change.<sup>57</sup> The concern regarding the degree of factuality versus fictionality in differentiating these sources is, of course, valid—with “fictionality” often depicted as a crucial indicator of the danger of “popular”, non-religious writing and reading, which was considered a threat, specifically to the supposedly impressionable minds of “women, children, and servants” (Armstrong 1987: 18; cf. also Sussman 2000: 11; Warner 2000). Nonetheless, as I will maintain, it still seems pertinent to position Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*—framed by an increasingly conventionalised fictional editor as a supposedly factual first-person account after all<sup>58</sup>—next to Equiano’s allegedly “factual” *Interesting Narrative* (2003 [1789]), whose “truth claim” today is contested more than ever (cf. Carretta 2005a, b). What connects the foundational

“realism” of both Defoe and Equiano is the assumed truth of introspection and this is also the reason that I will not begin with Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (2003 [1688]) which is indebted still to the courtly romance.<sup>59</sup> In contrast to *Oroonoko*’s gruesome but noble fate, readers are encouraged to understand the experience and inner lives of Crusoe and Equiano as true or at least believable as they seem like “us”, which is underscored by the importance of proper names in these narratives, for example. In my context then it is specifically the familiarity that the accounts of the Black subjects produce which prompts me to read them with their novelistic counterparts. Once more, Gallagher explains how this impacted the emergence of models of affective familial belonging—a sphere that becomes desirable for modern men and women and also marks the entryway for Black Atlantic authors in claiming the status as modern feeling subjects while the legal framework still dehumanises them as chattel.

Novels promoted a disposition of ironic credulity enabled by optimistic incredulity; one is dissuaded from believing the literal truth of a representation so that one can instead admire its likelihood and extend enough credit to buy into the game. Such flexible mental states were the *sine qua non* of modern subjectivity. Everyone seemed to benefit from them. For example, they may have eased the way into the modern affective family. Since marriageable young people were given somewhat greater freedom of choice starting in the eighteenth century, and were also expected to have a genuine emotional attachment to their spouses, some form of affective speculation became necessary. (Gallagher 2006: 346)

In short, the claim to individual feeling, resulting from what Gallagher calls “affective speculation”, is the proposed link between Black testimonies and the rise of those narratives that we call the English novel—a label often applied retrospectively to eighteenth-century fiction and only stabilised in the course of the nineteenth. The emphasis on feeling not only marks the shifts in how marriageable (young) people related to each other, it is also a narrative strategy employed by Black authors to claim subject status in the first place.<sup>60</sup>

Hence, while I am aware of the differences between the kinds of narrative texts contrasted in this book, ranging from novels, autobiographies, letters to travel writings, Black testimony is not to be confused simply with the factual counterpart to the fictional novel. Moreover, my argument is not based on celebratory inclusion or a counter history of radical Blackness.

Entanglement as I mentioned earlier also pertains to questions of co-option, collusion, and the limits of agency. Here, too, generic and political demands shape the (literary) discourse of these texts. There was a “pressing political necessity of portraying an authentic autobiographical self immediately recognisable within the generic types of black manhood and womanhood serviceable to the abolitionist cause”, as Celeste-Marie Bernier (2007: 60) argues. Bernier continues,

The works of these early writer-orators reveals the beginnings of a tradition of protest, which maintained an independent black subjectivity by seeming to satiate the subject-matter demands of abolitionist discourse at the same time as engaging in literary dramatisation and aesthetic experimentation. (2007: 62)

This demonstrates that Black authors very consciously had to write in specific ways to be heard by a majority white audience but this is not simply to say that they could not and did not challenge aesthetic conventions in terms of form and content.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, in extension of Watt’s rise of the novel argument and the concomitant critique of his account, I want to show that the development of the novel form can be positioned in relation to entangled tonalities that not only gave rise to more “realist” expressions of gendered introspection, as is often argued, it can and should also be linked to the contestation of the dehumanisation of people of African descent by claiming (British) familiarity. For such an endeavour a transdisciplinary dialogue between the introduced historical research on European modernity and the history of transatlantic slavery with the study of literary texts (and their specific aesthetic strategies) seems pertinent.<sup>62</sup> This book thus profits from and partakes in a growing field of eighteenth-century and Victorian literary studies that conceptualise the rise of the novel as a global literary history, or, in other words, it is invested in the concerted efforts to “provincialise” European literary canons.

Interestingly, this debate is currently associated with a range of labels such as atlantic or transatlantic (literary) studies—approaches that seem less inclined to use the word “postcolonial” that was ubiquitous in 1990s literary criticism, which might have to do with the strong (but somewhat short-sighted) association of the term postcolonial simply with a temporal “after” colonialism.<sup>63</sup> These interdisciplinary trans/atlantic approaches also productively challenge demarcations of literary periodisation (with

more and more studies dealing with much greater or unconventional time frames, such as Baucom (2005) or Laura Doyle's *Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity* (2008), in order to do justice to the *longue durée* of European modernity).<sup>64</sup> In the following chapters, I want to explore the potential of developing a transatlantic reassessment of the rise of the novel that, similar to the historical concepts of entangled histories, focuses on how we can reread the emergence of specific aesthetic registers in novel writing as entangled transatlantic tonalities. Hence, my attempt is to combine a materialist history of the rise of the novel that has profited from Watt's theory with a poststructuralist and postcolonial epistemology that is interested in how narrative forms are intertwined with networks of power and our imagination of (national) identities. I explicitly understand this endeavour as aligned with the project of postcolonial literary studies rather than an overhasty departure from it. Therefore, as a final step preceding the actual readings, I will revisit Edward Said's writing on counterpoint to explain how a focus on entangled tonalities seems especially suited if one wants to provide a transatlantic perspective on the rise of the British novel.

### ENTANGLED TONALITIES

In the wake of Foucault's poststructuralist critique, the rise of the novel also needs to be situated within a larger web of knowledge and power. As Davis argues, the novel is now seen "as a regulatory political discourse that served to construct the modern subject" (2000: 494) which diverges from Watt's "applied" understanding of the novel. This line of critique is closely associated with what became known as postcolonial literary studies which tends to depart from an assessment of nineteenth-century imperialism. In the wake of Said's (1994) foundational work on imperial culture, postcolonial literary studies for a long time has therefore focused *either* exclusively on how writers in Britain, such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, or William Makepeace Thackeray, have been shaped by the culture of imperialism (cf. Azim 1993; Perera 1991; and Brantlinger 2009 for a general overview). *Or*, the critical attention was shifted to the literatures in English across the globe with an emphasis on the localised meanings of "oppositional writing" that is seen as "writing back" to the canon only in later twentieth-century postcolonial literature. This field is largely inspired by the path-breaking study *The Empire Writes Back* by Ashcroft et al. (2002) (cf. also Eckstein 2007 for an overview).<sup>65</sup> Thus, despite the double focus



of postcolonial theory as a temporal *after* colonialism and an epistemological *beyond* colonialism, postcolonial literary studies have privileged this model of writing back to the centre, a rejection of Eurocentrism only after the fact of European modernity and imperialism.<sup>66</sup>

This yields two problems. First, this temporal frame excludes or at least impairs analysis of sources predating the high imperialism of the nineteenth century and, secondly, this view stabilises the notion of a hegemonic metropolitan centre which is only ever questioned retrospectively. The focus on entanglement is meant here as a challenging of both the temporal dimension and the ways in which canonical and marginalised authors are juxtaposed. Accordingly, reading marginalised and canonical literary voices in conjunction with and against each other becomes increasingly relevant in a contemporary effort to understand modern literary history in a global framework.

One important intervention into the conventional temporal framing of postcolonial literary studies is Aravamudan's work on French and British writings preceding Said's temporal focus on the nineteenth century in *Orientalism* (2003 [1978]). In his book, Aravamudan analyses a set of texts that bring about what he calls "Enlightenment Orientalism". He argues that "the oriental tale was an alternative genre to the domestic novel" (2012: 6) which has received too little critical attention by scholars of the novel/novelization.<sup>67</sup> However, rather than focus on a "transcultural utopian potential" (2012: 7) of non-realist writings dealing with the "Orient", as Aravamudan does in his pertinent comparatist critique of national(ist) literary history, my emphasis is on entanglements and the ways in which an eighteenth-century transatlantic enchantment with sentimentalised accounts of Britishness supports rather than opposes the psychological logic of the domestic novel. While I agree that varied accounts of eighteenth-century fiction which include non-realist travel tales are, of course, needed, there is also much to be gained from focusing on how the familiar and the strange concomitantly construct the myth of the bourgeois family. So, somewhat in contrast to Aravamudan, who criticises the "national particularism" (2012: 75) of the rise of the novel narrative, the realist novel can and should, I argue, be understood also as a product of transnational encounter. Differing from Aravamudan's textual corpus, the sources analysed here are not an alternative archive of eighteenth-century prose fiction—quite the contrary, they might be called the "usual suspects". However, this attention to the entanglement of English canonical texts with Black Atlantic autobiographical writings can intervene into

more established postcolonial temporal frameworks looking at the links between the discourses on the abolition of slavery in the eighteenth century and the rise of a global imperial English culture in the nineteenth century. Entanglement, the contemporaneity of more diverse voices, also challenges aesthetic notions of how English writing developed and hence it is not only Watt's theory of the rise of the novel that needs to come under scrutiny but also Said's postcolonial strategy of contrapuntal reading which he proposed in *Culture and Imperialism*.

As mentioned before, Said urges scholars to look at the "comparative literature of imperialism" to understand "different experiences contrapuntally" as "intertwined and overlapping histories" (1994: 18). Said explains that contrapuntal reading emphasises the influence of the colonies on metropolitan lifestyles (the references to Australia in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (2003b [1861]) or to the West Indies and India in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (2006 [1847]), for instance) but this acknowledgement of interdependency will also always entail an element of possible resistance (Said 1994: 66–67). Daniel Carey explains Said's contrapuntal reading practice as follows: "As we might expect from his naming of the practice, the first analysis comes from an analogy with music. Said remarks that in classical music, the theory of counterpoint depends on the relationship between multiple themes, none of which are dominant" (2009: 109). In order to produce meaning, imperial culture has brought forward, "a structure of reference and attitude, a web of affiliations, connections [...], which can be read as leaving a set of ghostly notations" (Said 1994: 125) in a text. So, evoking the muted sound of the ghost note of imperialism and colonialism here, much like the figure of the "spectre" that is often evoked in the traumatic history of slavery, the writing of imperialism, in Said's understanding, also entails its own "counterpoint". Nevertheless, Said, seems to frame this form of contrapuntal reading strategy as a retrospective act and, as Gesa Mackenthun cautions, places too strong an emphasis on harmony as an outcome of counterpoint that has "conservative"/New Criticist tendencies (2004: 343). Moreover, Carey criticises that in postcolonial contrapuntal readings of canonical classics, there is a tendency to superimpose anachronistic contemporary categories onto literary texts, a critique that shapes much of literary studies' concerns about cultural studies' methodologies in general and postcolonial readings in particular. In this way, Carey argues, contrapuntal reading quickly turns into what he calls "palimpsestic reading" (2009: 109), *overwriting* the original text with another.

In his rereading of *Robinson Crusoe* against the backdrop of this critique, Carey for instance highlights that the category of “chattel slavery” obscures the more complicated eighteenth-century framework of servitude (cf. also Boulukos 2008: 76–77) which I will discuss in more detail in the chapter on Defoe and Equiano. In addition to Carey’s call for post-colonial readings closer to the actual source and the need to take seriously the historically specific connotations of concepts, I want to emphasise another problematic aspect in such postcolonial literary reading practices. Too often these have not taken into consideration the contemporaneous interrelation between “metropole and colony” in focusing on the metropolitan texts exclusively.<sup>68</sup>

Conversely, close readings of early Black British literature tend to over-emphasise the colonial subject “mimicking” colonial culture and thus fail to note the investment in Otherness that is necessary for hegemonic self-definition. Britain has much to gain in moral standing in highlighting the early modern Black British voices.<sup>69</sup> What is more, we need to link this problem of “original” and “copy” to the tendency to describe all Black writing as imitative, as Gates has argued in relation to David Hume’s (1987 [1742]) dismissal of the Jamaican poet Francis Williams whose accomplishments Hume linked to the mindless repetition of a parrot (cf. Gates 1988: 113). Against this backdrop, elaborating on his concept of “Signifyin(g)”, Gates forcefully argues that the trickster game of repetition is much more than a banal copying. Black discourse rewrites the received textual tradition (cf. 1988: 124). I would add that the very fact that the Western tradition is mimicked (and thereby altered) is part of its own understanding of superiority: the success story of the Anglophone novel attests to this form of entanglement. The hegemony of cultural forms is also reliant on their (global) export and inclusion of marginalised perspectives and will in this process of entanglement of course be modified. Concurrently, Brycchan Carey stresses the centrality of slavery in any understanding of canon formation: “We can no longer approach writing about slavery as somehow separate, or as a special case. Rather, we must see it as central to the development of European, American, and African culture, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first centuries” (2005: 13).

Said’s contrapuntal reading might be called a well-trodden territory in postcolonial studies, but if applied not only retrospectively, contrapuntal reading, or rather a focus on entanglement as I want to propose, alters histories of modernity, and this path, I argue, has not been explored in all its consequences with reference to the emergence of the modern British

canon. In English literary studies, we are now faced with the rich plurality of English literatures across the globe and at the same time witness a return to more canonical sources regarding English Literature (writ large) in Britain when it comes to decision making about which texts should be taught in schools and universities and the demands to decolonise syllabi, for example. I want to emphasise the need to apply this globalised lens to English literature in Britain as well. Hence, despite a “global” agenda, my line of enquiry employs a more modest transatlantic perspective, a postcolonial entangled reading predating the high time of imperialism to “zoom in” on the construction of familial feeling with regard to national belonging and canon formations in Britain.<sup>70</sup> This approach avoids referring to Black British writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as a mere curious fact, but acknowledges their presence as indeed formative for the construction of Britishness which we now imagine having become a contested identity only under the auspices of twentieth-century migration. In this understanding modernity is also a product of affective relationality.

In summary, entanglement here is meant to draw on and expand the postcolonial insight that metropolitan and colonial cultures are interlinked and that this exchange shapes cultural artefacts. Entanglement extends the scope of historical enquiry: It can help put into perspective the eighteenth-century Atlantic challenges to the European enlightenment, addressed in the first part of this book, and the nineteenth-century restructuring of the domestic sphere with respect to imperial expansion, which comes under closer scrutiny in the second part of *Familial Feeling*. Nonetheless, reading autobiographical writings of the early Black Atlantic in a dialogical or entangled relation with the more canonical literary works is not to suggest that this necessarily amounts to direct intertextual quotes—and in the case of Defoe and Equiano there is also considerable historical distance between the texts. I am more interested in what I perceive as a similarity in tone, a form of writing that produces affective resources of belonging that are equally mobilised from the centre and the margin (which is not to deny different access to cultural capital and power asymmetries among the authors). In this way, I hope to provide a re-evaluation of the development of aesthetic forms of literary self-fashioning—the rise of affective individualism that I understand as sutured to what I have called “familial feeling”.

For this purpose, I draw, as mentioned, on the immensely helpful discussion of aesthetic tone which Ngai has introduced in her elaborations on “ugly feelings” (2007). Focusing on US-American Modernist writing,

Ngai offers valuable tools for the study of feelings in literature, always a textual representation of affect after all, which seems especially delicate if the focus is on non-contemporary sources adding further distance to the supposed extra-textual affective dimension. Ngai's concept of tone helps bring affective and aesthetic dimensions in conjunction and by deliberately evoking musicality is also reminiscent of Said's counterpoint. It shares characteristics with narratological categories such as "mood"<sup>71</sup> and "voice" but should avoid what the New Critics derided as "affective fallacy". Ngai defines "tone" as follows: "[T]he affective-aesthetic idea of tone [...] is reducible neither to the emotional response a text solicits from its reader nor to representations of feelings within the world of its story" (2007: 41). It is a "hyper-relational concept of *feeling* that encompasses attitude: a literary text's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' its audience and world" (Ngai 2007: 43). Tone thus is also not tied to a generic logic; it does not operate on the level of comedy and tragedy as modes<sup>72</sup> but rather links back to Williams's structure of feeling. It is both aesthetic and political without necessarily being reducible to an identitarian logic of representation which would tie specific modes of expression to social positionalities. The entangled tonalities of familial feeling are, again in Williams's terms, "at once interlocking and in tension" (1985 [1977]: 132). They describe how British nationality is considered in relation to inclusion and exclusion specifically before and after the abolition of slavery via representations of familial feeling. Hence, when pairing texts in this study under headings of tonality (which creates a set of tones and is therefore a superordinate category of tone), I am not so much claiming that they share one common aesthetic strategy, but that they can be linked via their specific "affective bearing" or "orientation" regarding Britishness and the family. Some of the juxtaposed texts are characterised by similar discursive and aesthetic means, as the dash in *Sterne* and *Sancho*, for example; others employ disparate strategies, as the internal conflicted free indirect discourse in *Austen* as opposed to the more outwardly directed anger in *Wedderburn's* pamphlet. Nevertheless, they share, I argue, a likeness of spectrum—as in a similar colour palate that can be used by employing very different painting techniques<sup>73</sup>—rather than accordance or harmony when it comes to how they relate discourses of familial belonging and Britishness. In my reading of *Austen*, I will come back to these nuances, for instance, in criticising the underlying claim of harmony in Said's theory of counterpoint which entangled tonalities should explicitly avoid.

Entanglement thus exceeds the dimension of *Verflechtungsgeschichte* as shared histories of modernity, it also functions aesthetically as a history of shared tonalities of literature as a world-making process. The Greek term *aisthesis* describes the capacity to feel. Western theories of aesthetics have taken this as their starting point to develop the sciences of the fine arts, of accomplished expression in literary discourse that would correspond to this idea of refined feeling. Those, however, who have been excluded from these canon-making mechanisms of Western modernity have needed to claim the capacity to feel much more fundamentally. Looking at the archive of abolitionist writing, one is quickly overwhelmed by the mentioned tropes of sentimentality so abundant in the texts of both white abolitionists and early Black writers who emphasise sameness with regard to the capacity to feel. Accordingly, these linguistic representations of suffering could be read as promoting almost the exact tonal opposite of how Ngai characterises Herman Melville's "atonal tone" (2007: 88). In contrast to Melville's form of Modernist detachment, which lacks any obvious offer of empathic identification for the readers, abolitionist writing displays empathic surfeit or "overkill": the beating of human beings, the cutting of family ties, and sexualised violence give an empathising audience all the affective spectacle, often in embellished language, thereby promoting a virtuous Christian impetus of caring righteously.<sup>74</sup> As a consequence of this oversaturation with sentimentalised suffering, one could argue that readers have actually quickly become somewhat emotionally indifferent to the tonality of this form of writing.

As literary scholars dealing with a topic such as slavery, of which we have so few first-hand documentations, we have to come to terms with the "the slipperiness and elusiveness of slavery's archive" (Hartman 2008: 17). Archives are formations of power and what can be found in them might often be precisely those texts and objects documenting or being instrumental in the oppression of subjects racialised, sexualised, and gendered as the Other. Such a composition of archives can induce feelings of historical disconnection and depression for precisely these subjects and their descendants. Consequently, writing in the wake of the so-called negative turn in queer theory<sup>75</sup> has drawn attention to the implications of hegemonic temporalities and historiographies foregrounding the negative or "bad feelings" that archival work can entail, especially when enquiring into forms of oppression and of being silenced.<sup>76</sup>

While the questioning of grand narratives and "writing back" are readily seen as modes of resistance, what can the historical archive still tell us

that might be relevant for thinking the politics of belonging today? I will return to these ethical challenges in any contemporary effort to engage the archive of slavery in the conclusion. The idea of entangled tonalities then is also indebted to queer epistemologies and is meant as a “messy” or “strange” way of engaging with literary history. It is concerned less with separating marginalised and canonical literary voices or clear-cut periodic and genre demarcations than with how the increasingly racialised logic of the British family is narrated in Victorian fiction and how this, in turn, can be linked to the earlier sentimental rhetoric of abolition. For this purpose, it makes sense, in my opinion, to juxtapose autobiographical and fictional longer and shorter prose narratives since Black writing initially was to be found mainly in the realm of the testimonial/autobiographical rather than straightforwardly fictional publications. Becoming a writing subject first of all implies the privilege of literacy as well as the time and means to publish that only a very small minority of Black subjects had access to. Nonetheless, the archive of slavery and its abolition affects definitions of self and Other, it is not a side phenomenon of “official history”. In a 2015 essay Gikandi states that the challenge we have to face is to “read the lives of the slaves in the archive of the masters, not to recover the authentic voices of the enslaved, but to witness new voices and selves emerging in what appears to be the site of discursive interdiction” (2015: 92). The construction of a British exceptional moral standing as pioneers of abolition (in contrast to the former colony, the United States) gave subjects like Equiano, Sancho, Wedderburn, and Seacole the opportunity to become modern subjects not after the fact of modernity but as part of emerging modernity. In fact, these Black British voices are *constitutive* of the very modern foundation of what British enlightenment is capable of. Positioning the Black authors within a framework of resistance versus subversion, as “postcolonial” literary voices in opposition to the canonical authors, seems to obstruct an understanding of their entangled relation to modernity. Writing of the early Black Atlantic stands in a more conflicted relationship to Britishness than being reduced to the periphery of empire whose subjects aspired to be included into the national community of British privilege. A postcolonial interest in the literature of the early Black Atlantic then must resist urges to highlight the extraordinary accomplishments of these authors and rather aim to understand the entanglement of voices from the multiple peripheries and centres as also affecting hegemonic expressions of Britishness. In short, in revisiting the rise of the novel from a postcolonial/transatlantic viewpoint, I am more interested in the disarrayed

entanglements in and with the past than a presentist affective investment in counter histories. In the following literary readings then, I am not telling a story of “good” versus “bad” appropriations of familial feeling. In this context, Foucault’s famous dictum that there is no outside of power, that “there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled” (1998: 94), which is at the heart of queer epistemologies, still bears repeating. I am also not concerned with supposedly “authentic” or “natural” familial feelings. Quite the contrary, it is, in fact, the artifice of the different tonalities that I hope to highlight, which again goes hand in hand with an understanding of social norms as reliant on emotionalising and naturalising discourses, as Foucault and Judith Butler maintain.

Hence, the next chapter will focus on eighteenth-century conceptions of race and slavery and how they relate to Britishness which will be discussed in two texts that laid the foundations for claiming “modern familiarity”: Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (2003 [1719]) with its “insular masculinity” and Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative* (2003 [1789]) that promotes an idea of what I call “Oceanic Britishness”. Defoe and Equiano both make us “invest” in the foundational idea of individualism despite very different stakes. Their foundational tonality is characterised by the affective establishment of modern subjectivity: familiarity with these literary heroes is achieved via an early version of formal realism based on the representation of introspection as well as retrospection on an “ordinary” life. In the second chapter of the first section, I analyse how the established and already ridiculed style of sentimentalism is evoked by Ignatius Sancho in his letters (1998 [1782]) and by Laurence Sterne in his fictional writing (1998 [1759–1767] and 2005 [1768]) and direct replies to Sancho. Sancho and Sterne in many ways play with disinterest and digressive modes that make their readers notice the discrepancies between a culture of taste and the realities of enslavement. Their digressive tonality is shaped by an overtly sentimental affective bearing towards all topics they address (including slavery) and their lessened interest in representing coherent subjectivity, formally highlighted by digressive excursions, non-linearity, and the use of the famous dash. The nineteenth-century writing of Robert Wedderburn and Jane Austen shows increasing unease with the ways in which the familial and the colonial sphere are intertwined locating modes of resistance in terms of both content and form. They both promote more active counter strategies in their writings that could be described as resistant: They represent wilful subjects who stand in opposition to the gendered and racialised familial order of the day which is



achieved via psychological introspection and free indirect discourse in Austen and incendiary rhetoric in Wedderburn. Finally, gesturing towards a new phase of Britain's colonial expansion, we can witness how Charles Dickens as well as Mary Seacole bolster a more nationalist project of Victorian family values in Britain's newfound position of imperial might in the mid-nineteenth century. In their travelogues, they are paradoxically more invested in domesticity and yet imperial in ambition. Their consolidating tonality is characterised by a narrower concept of familial feeling, based on romanticised ideals of motherhood and paternalistic notions of British superiority, combining a liberal critique of slavery in the United States with expansionist imperial logic that is often voiced in overt narrator comment. The chapters of this book thus focus on four different tonalities—foundations, digressions, resistances, and consolidations—and generally follow a chronological order, except for Sancho's writing which is discussed with Sterne despite its preceding Equiano's later *Narrative*.

The title of this book, *Familial Feeling*, does not connote one specific register of feeling, such as happiness or sadness. Rather, I am interested in the overall capacity to feel in specific ways, to be recognised as a feeling subject in the first place, which can be seen in the strategy of the Black authors to address their audience as empathising readers. Their expressions of feeling influence who is considered a familiar, or, in Butler's words, an intelligible subject,<sup>77</sup> belonging to Britain and its increasingly literate (middle-class) public sphere. These developments are consolidated via literary reflections on moral sentiment and sympathy in the eighteenth century and social reform and professionalised philanthropy in the nineteenth century with longer prose forms such as the novel becoming the most relevant genre in this context. It is especially the ambivalence of such an emotionalising register of inclusion and exclusion that I want to trace (as well as the ongoing effects for national memorial cultures, as I argue in the conclusion). The nuclear and the national family become inextricably linked and ever since Samuel Richardson's voluminous epistolary novel *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (2004 [1747–1748]), the familial sphere turns into the site of belonging *and* terror. Looking at texts such as Wedderburn's *The Horrors of Slavery* (1991 [1824]), Austen's *Mansfield Park* (2003 [1814]), Seacole's conception of herself as maternal war hero in the *Wonderful Adventures in Many Lands* (2005 [1857]), or Mrs Jellyby's misguided philanthropy in Dickens's *Bleak House* (2003a [1852–53]) shows that the way we feel is linked to registers of the familial and the national. These texts set the tone for familial feeling by providing

foundational ideas of modernity (Defoe and Equiano), playful digressions (Sancho and Sterne), resisting perspectives (Austen and Wedderburn), as well as more conciliatory undertones in relation to empire (Dickens and Seacole).

## NOTES

1. Some of the arguments raised here have been published previously in an earlier much shorter version and are reproduced with permission of De Gruyter: Haschemi Yekani, Elahe. 2016. Feeling Modern: Narratives of Slavery as Entangled Literary History. In *The Humanities between Global Integration and Cultural Diversity*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Birgit Mersmann, 117–134. Berlin: De Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110452181-009.
2. Blair's speech is quoted in *The Guardian*: Cf. "Personally I believe the bicentenary offers us a chance not just to say how profoundly shameful the slave trade was—how we condemn its existence utterly and praise those who fought for its abolition, but also to express our deep sorrow that it ever happened, that it ever could have happened and to rejoice at the different and better times we live in today".  
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/nov/26/race.immigrationpolicy> (accessed 15 April 2018).
3. The museum is in fact a gallery rather than a whole museum located in the Merseyside Maritime Museum.
4. The list and statement can be accessed here: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/visit/floor-plan/legacies/blackachieverswall/index.aspx> (accessed 15 April 2018).
5. Cf. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/15/why-the-children-of-windrush-demand-an-immigration-amnesty> and <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-43792411> (accessed 15 April 2018).
6. I use the word British rather than English because the notion of Britishness is related to both the British Isles and the British empire as encompassing more than one nation. Both terms remain conflictingly related, and it is short-sighted to assume a closed and static national identity of Englishness versus a more flexible and inclusive Britishness. On the one hand, Englishness functions as the powerful norm of imperial identity formation that often superimposes Britishness; on the other hand, both Englishness and Britishness are themselves mobilised in the colonial encounter. Hence, I will often use British in ways that imply hegemonic expressions of Englishness. Catherine Gallagher sees Britishness as a "platform for national heterogeneity" (2000: 80). She explains: "Britain, many would

now agree, began less as a homeland than as a way of being abroad. It did not pre-exist its empire and then ‘expand’ overseas, but was instead produced by expansion and might therefore be analysed as a phenomenon of extra-territorialization” (Gallagher 2000: 78). Accordingly, it is important to emphasise that the British empire has never been a conglomerate of homogenous cultures. Evan Gottlieb highlights the importance of the concept of sympathy, as it was developed by Scottish enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century, to promote a sense of a shared national identity of the English and the Scottish following the 1707 Act of Union which he calls “sympathetic Britishness” (2007: 18). He not only highlights Defoe’s involvement in these endeavours, he also shows the close links between feeling and national identity that I explore from a transatlantic rather than inner-British perspective.

7. Gikandi has aptly characterised the situation of the slave as shaped by “temporal dislocation” and “genealogical isolation” (2011: 86). He stresses reading and writing as ways to reclaim subjectivity, and he mentions Sancho as a prime example.
8. In contrast to Firdous Azim’s important study *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (1993), which traces the theme of imperialism and its effect on subject-formation in writings by Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, and the Brontës, I postulate an affective tendency towards Britishness that works from the centre *and* the margin simultaneously and can produce more ambivalent effects of inclusion and exclusion than a straightforward disavowal of the Other.
9. Elizabeth Barnes uses the phrase “familial feeling” specifically in relation to US-American sentimentalism: “In American fiction and nonfiction alike, familial feeling proves the foundation for sympathy, and sympathy the foundation of democracy. For American authors, a democratic state is a sympathetic state, and a sympathetic state is one that resembles a family” (1997: 2). While her argument of linking the personal to the political via sympathetic identification with the “national” family is indisputable, she concedes that claiming this feeling as exceptionally “American” is more an assertion of the American authors of the period (cf. 1997: x) than a persuasive form of distinction from British forms of “familial feelings”. My readings, which emphasise the entanglement of such national narratives across the transatlantic sphere, will underline this. In his study on contemporary queer liberalism and the continuing racialisation of intimacy called *The Feeling of Kinship*, David Eng contests “romanticized notions of privacy and family as outside capitalist relations of exploitation and domination” and urges us to “resist the idealized notion of family and kinship relations as somehow removed from or eccentric to the racial tensions” (2010: 8). The use of the phrase “familial feeling” then tries to acknowledge the pow-

erful inclusionary force of discourses of the familial while simultaneously intervening in naturalising and racist assumptions about the very make-up of the national family.

10. However, Stone calls for more precision in distinguishing how capitalist aspirations promoted these smaller family units in the upper middle class before the labouring classes embraced the model (cf. 1977: 664). This spirit of capitalism then is not only linked to working conditions but, much in accordance with my argument, with the public imagination of individualism promoted in the literature of the time. Sarah Maza (1997) too cautions against an over-emphasis of class/bourgeoisie to describe the growing importance of the nuclear family in the eighteenth century and draws attention to sentimentalism and the idea of authentic feeling subjects who enter a contractual relationship—one that promotes gendered inequalities.
11. Pierre Bourdieu, too, emphasises such regulatory mechanisms that are dependent on “*obliged affections* and *affective obligations* of family feeling (conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, brotherly and sisterly love, etc.)” (1998: 68). For a discussion of the massive demographic shifts in the nineteenth century, cf. Kertzer and Barbagli (2001).
12. What is more, Albrecht Koschorke has argued that while religious patterns lose cultural authority, they keep their normative function in these processes of secularisation: “The role of the heavenly father in the Holy Family is replaced by the ‘state as father’ in the modern nuclear family” (2001: 122, my translation).
13. Anderson’s much-cited definition of nations as “imagined political community” reads as follows: “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members [...]” He continues, “it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (1991: 6–7).
14. Vera Nünning (2003) reads the expansion of traditional “female attributes” to the men of feeling and the increased visibility of female authors as a blurring of gender differences in the eighteenth century. As a result of the conservative turn in the 1790s, the gendered public and private spheres regain prominence. This shift will also become apparent in the renewed interest in motherhood rather than sentimental men in Victorian fiction that I discuss in the second part of this book.
15. The volume *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic* edited by Stephen Ahern (2013) also provides a good overview of the flourishing field. Moreover, Levecq (2008) offers a comparison of the ways in which senti-

mental discourse employed by African American and Afro-British authors shaped notions of liberty helping to bring about diverging British and US-American political cultures in the second half of the eighteenth century. There is also scholarship that explicitly links Romanticism and slavery such as Lee (2002) and Thomas (2000).

16. However, Jonathan Rose (2006) shows that despite growing literacy, many Victorians still predominantly read general literature such as history as opposed to only about forty percent novels.
17. Carey, too, notes a diminishing of the sentimental rhetoric: “By 1807, when the British slave trade was finally abolished, most—but not all—abolitionist rhetoric had moved on from sentimentalism” (2005: 9).
18. In the second half of the eighteenth century initially a religiously motivated conception of polygenesis (the idea that there were entirely different species of human beings rather than one common Godly creation) was employed to increasingly racialise African difference and legitimate slavery as compatible with Christianity, sometimes incorporating the idea of the hierarchical great chain of being. This view was then translated into forms of scientific racism and an essentialising of biological difference at the beginning of the nineteenth century as Boulukos (2008) argues (cf. also Sussman 2000: 193–194). In the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of the Darwinian revolution, this thinking is debunked and a common root of humanity (monogenesis) becomes the scientific consensus. However, difference is quickly re-established as civilisational progress. Darwinian ideas of biological evolution—which are, in fact, much more open and less theological-teleological—are problematically and simplistically translated into Social Darwinist conceptions, which bolstered a paradoxically humane conception of colonialism as the “civilising mission”, as Armstrong has argued: “Were polygenetic thinking to prevail, the British public would have to understand the colonial enterprise as nothing more than ruthless competition for goods and territory in which Europeans were proving to be the superior predator. By coming up with a theory that opens a temporal gulf between primitive and modern man and yet includes all variations of man within a single species, Darwin’s theory provided not only a scientific explanation for British superiority. It also offered a way for the British to consider themselves more humane than the people they dominated while profiting by their competitive superiority over colonial populations” (2005: 129). Cf. also Haschemi Yekani (2011: 43–46) for a discussion of how Darwin’s theories were employed to promote a new colonial ideal of British manliness at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.
19. David Armitage introduces a more precise taxonomy and distinguishes *Circum*-Atlantic history as “the transnational history of the Atlantic world”

from *Trans*-Atlantic history, which he describes as “the international history of the Atlantic world” and finally *Cis*-Atlantic history, that is, “national or regional history within an Atlantic context” (2002: 15). In this understanding, my project falls most closely within the last category because, despite the transatlantic crossings (mainly to the United States and the Caribbean but later to Asia, too), I am interested in how these international networks feedback into a specific British self-understanding that is mobilised by both Black and canonical authors.

20. This framework, of course, also extends into twentieth-century and contemporary efforts to take into consideration increased globalisation and the resulting “multiple modernities” as S.N. Eisenstadt (2000) calls this proliferation of the contemporaneity of Western and non-Western forms of “being modern”.
21. More recently, for instance, Carina L. Johnson and Catherine Molineux proposed a “transimperial” focus on material traces to examine the “histories of extra-Europeans in Europe” (2018: 90) and their involvement in European self-definition.
22. As is well-known, Captain Luke Collingwood of the Liverpool ship *Zong* had thrown 131 weakened enslaved Africans of his “cargo” overboard to subsequently claim compensation for his “loss” from the insurance. The (first) court case, which ruled in favour of the owners of the ship, outraged part of the British public, including Equiano and Granville Sharp, who consequently, unsuccessfully tried to charge the crew with murder (cf. Walvin 2007: 147). The first verdict was later annulled in a second case that eventually revoked the insurance claim (but there never was a murder charge, which would have challenged chattel slavery more fundamentally).
23. David Dabydeen’s long narrative poem *Turner* (2002 [1994]), Fred D’Aguiar’s novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (2014 [1997]), and M. NourbeSe Philip’s poetry cycle *Zong!* (2011 [2008]) are among the most well-known contemporary literary responses to the *Zong* massacre.
24. Gilroy defines the culture of the Black Atlantic as follows: “the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering” (1993: 3).
25. Cf. Michelle Wright (2004: 35–39) for a discussion of the colonialist implications of Hegel’s thinking. Furthermore, Wright shows how in repudiating the Othering of Blackness by European theorists of enlightenment, the first generation of twentieth-century African and diasporic counterdiscursive thinkers of Black subjectivity at times replicated heteronormative assumptions that are so ingrained in ideas of national belonging.

26. Stephen Fryer's *Staying Power* (2010) remains the most comprehensive historical account of Black people in Britain and is one of the main reference books for the study's historical framework. Kathleen Chater (2009) provides more in-depth demographic insight into why it remains difficult to ascertain reliable numbers about the actual Black population of the time.
27. Cf. Swaminathan (2009) for an analysis of the shifting rhetoric in debating the slave trade in Britain.
28. Generally, there are two diverging opinions among historians which factors led to abolition: those who understand this as a success of humanitarianism versus those who favour a more economic framework. For helpful critical overviews of these debates, cf. Boulukos (2013); Brown (2006: 13–22); Ellis (1996: 50–51); Sussman (2000: 11–14). Additionally, Lisa Lowe emphasises that the attempts to keep the sugar industry profitable coincided with wide-spread fear of “Black revolution in the colonies” (2015: 13) and this will be taken up in my reading of Wedderburn.
29. Sussman speaks of “anxieties” that led to a shift in public opinion from an initial pro-slavery stance following the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which had granted Britain the monopoly in the Atlantic slave trade. Specifically, the colonial expansion resulting from the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) and the following loss of the American War of Independence (1775–1783) gave rise to concern that Britain was relying too strongly on the colonies and the Atlantic economy (cf. Sussman 2000: 13; also Woodard 1999: 2).
30. There is now some speculation whether Mansfield’s own family history might have been an influence on his decision as Dido Elizabeth Belle (1761?–1804), who was the illegitimate daughter of his nephew Sir John Lindsay and an enslaved woman, was his protégée and lived at his house. The 2013 British feature film *Dido Elizabeth Belle* (dir. Amma Asante) is based on her life story.
31. Ellis also names other topics such as prostitution, which, like the consumption of alcohol, is an important arena of social reform and regulation of populations which are increasingly framed as a danger to “national hygiene” in the course of the nineteenth century.
32. In her widely cited introduction to *Sensibility*, Janet Todd writes, “The arousal of pathos through conventional situations, stock familial characters and rhetorical devices is the mark of sentimental literature. Such literature buttonholes the reader and demands an emotional, even physical response” (1986: 3). It caters to indulgence in depictions of distress which can also quickly evoke embarrassment once too conventionalised. For a discussion of the medical and psychological/affective dimensions of sensibility in eighteenth-century culture, cf. Csengei (2012).
33. Rai offers a reading of *Pamela*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Man of Feeling* in a contrapuntal relation with texts written by ex-slaves (Mary Prince, Quobna

Ottobah Cugoano, and Olaudah Equiano). While his discussion of sympathy in relation to Foucault's theory of governmentality is highly convincing and I adopt many of his propositions, his literary readings do not pay enough attention to aesthetic and generic specificities of some of his sources. In contrast to his contrapuntal approach, the entangled readings that I propose aim to highlight more strongly an ambivalence and difference in the literary voices (both hegemonic and marginalised) in the gradual changes from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. The greatest divergence then in his and my account is the shift that I suggest from eighteenth-century conventionalised claims to humanity, which can be found in the early, often heavily edited or even plagiarised abolitionist accounts that rely on a conception of moral sentiment and sympathy, to nineteenth-century conceptions of social reform and philanthropy. These I believe paved the way for a consolidation of racial difference in an increasingly Social Darwinist Victorian context that laid the foundation for British colonial expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century.

34. Ellis emphasises how the stylisation of feeling hindered political change: "The sentimental discussion of slavery is particularly eloquent because of the priority and privilege it accords to the feelings and to the heart, rather than the scopic typologies of complexion and race. Sentimentalism wants to believe that all humanity is equally capable of feeling and that this equality of feeling is not determined or prejudiced by appearance or skin colour. Depictions of slavery are also felicitous to the sentimental interest in pain and suffering. In this way, sentimental writers had a significant role in the formation of the moral conscience of the abolition movement. [...] However, the sentimental approach, while advertising the suffering occasioned by slavery, fails or refuses to move beyond the depiction of its theme to a critique of that theme's subject, slavery proper" (1996: 86).
35. Cf. also Ellis (1996: 127) for more elaboration on the distinction between amelioration and abolition in sentimental fiction.
36. Gallagher highlights how the 1807 ruling radically altered the role of the British navy enforcing the abolition of the slave trade on the Atlantic: "In 1789, they [the British] were the most active slave-traders among European nations, holding 57.9 per cent of the Atlantic trade; by 1808 they had declared slave-trading piracy and were committed to its termination in the Atlantic" (2000: 85).
37. Providing an in-depth reading of the rhetoric used in the debates for and against the abolition of slavery in the British public sphere, Srividhya Swaminathan argues that this discourse contributed to "the idea of a collective national, commercial, moral identity". Further, similar to what I try to show with regard to the formation of a specific form of "familial feeling" in literature, she too, highlights that: "The form of national identity that



- emerged from the slave-trade debates of the late eighteenth century directly contributed to British imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (2009: 9).
38. Boulukos speaks of a "transatlantic gap in legal and social practices of race" (2008: 98).
  39. Harriet Jacobs, for instance, describes her visit to London in the following terms: "For the first time in my life I was in a place where I was treated according to my deportment, without reference to my complexion" (2000 [1861]: 204). Regarding the often-voiced allegation that in England the abolitionists fail to adequately address the bleak conditions of the working class at home and prioritise Black suffering, Jacobs counters, "I saw men working in the fields for six shillings, and seven shillings, a week, and women for sixpence, and sevenpence, a day, out of which they boarded themselves. Of course they lived in the most primitive manner; it could not be otherwise, where a woman's wages for an entire day were not sufficient to buy a pound of meat [...]. I had heard much about the oppression of the poor in Europe. The people I saw around me were, many of them, among the poorest poor. But when I visited them in their little thatched cottages, I felt that the condition of even the meanest and most ignorant among them was vastly superior to the condition of the most favored slaves in America" (2000 [1861]: 205). The reasoning against equating the oppression of the British poor with that of American slaves is dependent on tropes of familial feeling. The fact that enslaved families had to fear being torn apart at their master's whim pushes them outside the realm of human compassion as Jacobs elaborates. The focus on familial bonds thus becomes the *sine qua non* for the call for emancipation. Accordingly, Sandiford emphasises that "descriptions of distressed Africans being separated from their kin are a classic of antislavery sentimentalism" (1988: 50).
  40. This strategy continues into the twentieth century, when civil rights activist Paul Robeson "promotes Britain uncompromisingly as the home of freedom despite its role as a colonial power, exhibiting a strategic Anglophilia in order to attack American racism" (Rice 2003: 175).
  41. The ideal of domesticity is of course not only reflected in literary publications but also in the great demand for utilitarian conduct books. In her study on bourgeois dispositions of feeling and the middle-class habitus, Jana Gohrisch (2005) analyses fictional and non-fictional texts to show how happiness and contentment were constructed as specific middle-class registers of feeling in nineteenth-century Britain. Gohrisch explores the interaction between conduct books and self-help literature with Victorian fiction to conceptualise how happiness is increasingly linked to the domestic sphere: "For the authors of conduct literature, the family is the central site of individual happiness. Here the disposition for feeling compassion is

generated, which is to affect the entire society via individual actions and, thus, curb egoism. [...] These cognitions are either rooted in religion or a tradition of moral philosophy that is conveyed through intellectual activities, such as reading and conversations about literature and philosophy” (2005: 125, my translation). At the same time, taking into consideration Foucault’s theory of governmentality, one should not underestimate the regulatory power of concepts such as “happiness” that are tied so closely to domesticity and middle-classness. Emotions and politics hence are closely related, as cultural critics such as Lauren Berlant have demonstrated compellingly for the United States. The Declaration of Independence, for instance, which guarantees the right to the “pursuit of happiness”, underlines such an emotionalised understanding of politics. Berlant has argued that this framework instrumentalises the notion of personal responsibility as a form of “cruel optimism” (2011) and conceptualises success as an individual achievement thereby ignoring structural mechanisms of inequality. It is such a perspective on how emotional and political discourses are intertwined that I wish to propose for the British context here.

42. Joseph Rezek proposes the term “print Atlantic” (2012) to highlight the role of books as objects of exchange that connected various English-speaking cultures across the Black Atlantic.
43. Following an emotionological approach, Stedman analyses the uneasy balance between the increasing expression and simultaneous socially demanded control of feelings. While the studies of Gohrlich (2005) and Stedman (2002) offer insights into historical cultures of Victorian feeling, my focus is on how such literary expressions of feeling challenge as well as consolidate modes of inclusion and exclusion (from marginalised and hegemonic perspectives) in relation to Britain’s colonial expansion.
44. Nineteenth-century authors like Austen and the Brontës were aware of the generic demands of the novel in a way that their predecessors Defoe and Richardson were not (cf. Armstrong 1987: 38).
45. Cf. Nelson (2007) for an overview on kinship ties in Victorian England.
46. In a Foucauldian understanding, this form of regulation will also give rise to resistance. The “dark side” of family fortunes is addressed most notably in Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (and already somewhat more satirically in William Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (2003 [1848])). More and more, the Caribbean non-white descendants of the plantocracy, such as Robert Wedderburn, demand their share in familial privilege, as will be discussed in Chap. 4.
47. This Victorian debate is exemplified most clearly in Thomas Carlyle’s (1849) infamous essay “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question” and John Stuart Mill’s (1850) dissenting reply.

48. The so-called woman question, for instance, and the fight for female suffrage, passed only in 1918, continue to shape the public debate in Victorian England. Like the shift in the debate on abolition, the more radical claims of the 1790s for universal suffrage were toned down palpably by 1848 with the decline of Chartism and the passing of the Second Reform Act of 1867. George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, serialised from 1871 to 1872 and published in one volume in 1874, whose plot takes place in "ante-reform times" (2003 [1874]: 27), can be considered the most important literary reflection of the (in part failed) reform movement and the consequences for the self-conception of the British middle class. It is considered by many critics one of the most elaborate realist novels of psychological interiority. In this detailed depiction of the British "middle station" of life, the politics of abolition also play a small role in Mr Brooke's indecisive political ambitions that mark the move away from the more radical demands of the late eighteenth century: "'Quite right, Ladislaw; we shall make a new thing of opinion here,' said Mr. Brooke. 'Only I want to keep myself independent about Reform, you know; I don't want to go too far. I want to take up Wilberforce's and Romilly's line, you know, and work at Negro Emancipation, Criminal Law—that kind of thing'" (Eliot 2003 [1874]: 459).
49. For an overview of the so-called *affective turn*, cf. Clough and Halley (2007); Gregg and Seigworth (2010); Weber (2008). Traditionally, emotion has been seen as the cultural expression of affect (which describes bodily reactions) while feeling is sometimes used as an umbrella term that includes both aspects, which is how I employ familial feeling. While affect theorists, and specifically media studies scholars such as Brian Massumi, advocate a clear distinction between affect and emotion, others, especially critics indebted to phenomenology like Sara Ahmed, do not. Ahmed proposes the interchangeability of "emotion" and "affect" because both create bodily sensations and become inseparable in the process of generating meaning. "Emotions are not 'after-thoughts', but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit. [...] While you can separate an affective response from an emotion that is attributed as such (the bodily sensations [such as shivering] from the feeling of being afraid), this does not mean in practice, or in everyday life, they are separate" (Ahmed 2010: 32). What is more, the assumed "autonomy of affect" that Massumi postulates (2002: 23–45) neglects that, as Clare Hemmings puts it succinctly, "only for certain subjects can affect be thought of as attaching in an open way; others are so over-associated with affect that they themselves are the object of affective transfer" (2005: 561). For a more elaborate critique of Massumi's ideas, cf. Leys (2011). This distinction of affect and emotion was discussed first in a different context in Dietze et al. (2018). For my corpus, too, the

distinction between feeling and affect seems far less plausible. The generic convention of autobiographical writing of the formerly enslaved—to testify to experiences first-hand—is part, of course, of an appeal to feeling, as explained in relation to the so-called cult of sensibility. But by providing gruesome details about slavery the texts will also evoke a bodily affective response in their readers; they are a combination of the affective reaction in light of the terror of bodily harm of Others and the (often paternalistic) culturalised value that is bestowed on expressions of refined feeling in a compassionate culture.

50. In contrast to Suzanne Keen's (2007) narratological study on empathy and the novel, which employs interdisciplinary methodologies of cognitive narratology and reader response criticism, my methodology is indebted to the queer interrogation of the politics of emotion that critics like Berlant (2004) and Ann Cvetkovich (2007) have introduced. However, like literary scholar Ngai (2007), I do want to emphasise the need to understand the aesthetics of the representation of feelings as specific tonalities of literary texts.
51. The famous passage defining the concept of "double-consciousness" reads as follows: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois 2008 [1903]: 8).
52. J.A. Downie analyses the number of published fictional prose writings in England and strongly contests Defoe's status in Watt's account. Downie argues that it is only the later writing of Richardson and Fielding which sparked the wide-reaching demand for novels (cf. 2000: 325).
53. Cf. also Davis (2000) and Folkenflik (2000) for a more general overview of the development of theories of the novel.
54. Nonetheless, Watt is not entirely oblivious to these tonal differences. He concedes that while Jane Austen's writing can be considered most successful in depicting authentic introspection of modern men and women (cf. Watt 2000 [1957]: 297), *Tristram Shandy* remains "ultimately a parody of a novel" (Watt 2000 [1957]: 291).
55. Robert Mayer (2000) provides a convincing Bourdieu-inspired account of how this new "middle-brow taste", favouring shorter stories, functions as a rejection of the aristocratic romance in the eighteenth century. Boulukos, in turn, links this to the development of English studies as an academic discipline and posits that "the 'middle class' nature of the novel is a prod-

- uct of specific political moments within English studies rather than of the novels themselves" (2011: 378).
56. Davis speaks of the "news/novels discourse" that largely worked as an "undifferentiated matrix" (1996: 70) to highlight the close relationship between journalistic publications/news and the rise of the novel as a development specific to eighteenth-century Britain (which he contrasts to the French/European tradition of the novel). Cf. also Gallagher (2006: 340).
  57. There are, of course, numerous important publications (too numerous to list them individually here) which highlight the impact of both drama and poetry for the development of the eighteenth-century public sphere (many dealing specifically with slavery and abolition). However, since my focus is on the ways in which longer prose narratives create notions of familial feeling, which, I argue, is specific to the emotive appeal of prose narratives' modes of narrating introspection and empathy via focalization, I will not offer an extensive discussion of either genre. Said, too, emphasises the singular importance of the novel genre for the stabilisation of bourgeois society and imperialism (1994: 71).
  58. Cf. Downie's statement: "The strategy of Defoe's prefaces and their insistence on the 'factuality' of the spurious autobiographies they purport to introduce is well known. It was a marketing ploy which seems to have worked. It was not so much that contemporaries could not distinguish between fact and fiction, could not tell novels from news—rather the reverse. The primary conventions were already in place, but Defoe had problematized them" (2000: 321).
  59. Despite the elaborate conventionalised truth claim of the "eye-witness" homodiegetic narrator in *Oroonoko*, which is the reason critics like Davis (1996: 108) argue that the text should be read as part of the novel tradition, the lack of authentic introspection as a defining feature of the novel makes me consider *Oroonoko* as more closely affiliated with the romance, as does Boulukos. He explains: "Behn's hero lives in a lavish court, like any hero of romance, although the trappings are distinctly oriental; Defoe's Africans by contrast are nameless, naked savages in a bleak, empty landscape". Behn still "orientalises" Africans as courtly heroes while Defoe "others" them as the foil against which he can narrate an increasingly modern version of individualism (Boulukos 2008: 40).
  60. Gallagher elaborates that fictionality rather than factuality, in fact, makes it easier to empathise with characters: "we, like our eighteenth-century predecessors, feel things for characters not *despite* our awareness of their fictionality but *because of* it" (2006: 351–352). This claim seems well reasoned if we take into consideration the many sentimentalised accounts of Black suffering that were popular precisely because a white reading audience

could indulge in tearful renunciation of slavery without immediately being challenged into action or critical self-reflection.

61. The choice to focus on authors of the early Black Atlantic who contributed significantly to the four tonalities analysed in this study, means that other narratives including those by Ukawsaw Gronniosaw aka James Albert (1772) and Mary Prince (2004 [1831]), which were both written down by white amanuenses, cannot be discussed in greater detail.
62. Tim Watson (2013: 7), for instance, calls on postcolonial literary scholars to engage more with the still fairly unexplored (literary) archive of slave revolts.
63. Eve Tavor Bannet and Susan Manning, for instance, speak of transatlantic literary studies and highlight the “transatlantic print culture” (2012: 2) that was formative of Anglophone exchanges beginning in the seventeenth century. For American studies, the establishment of the Atlantic studies paradigm meant a shifting focus from the United States solely to engage with a broader Atlantic contact zone including the Caribbean and South America as William Boelhower argues (2008). While many of the texts he considers part of the “New Atlantic Studies Framework” are crucial for my understanding of entanglement as well, in his taxonomy (cf. 2008: 88–89), I endorse a postcolonial perspective on how nations come to matter in creating familiarity.
64. Differing in focus and spatio-temporal framing from the present study (analysing English and US-American texts from 1640 to 1940), Doyle argues that “in Atlantic modernity, freedom is a race myth” (2008: 3). The predominance of the “liberty plot”, which she regards as constitutive of the English-language novel in both England and the United States, constructs a distinctly racialised white capacity for freedom. She criticises that Watt’s account participates in a “‘Whig’ narrative” of liberation (2008: 20). However, Doyle also emphasises the agency of Black authors in this context, who “do more than ventriloquize the dominant liberty narrative with subversive *différance*. They implicitly generate an African-Atlantic archeology of it, installing themselves as its absent origin” (2008: 6). While I find many insights in Doyle’s study that also discusses how the trope of rape was instrumental for the increasing psychologising introspection of the realist novel convincing, I want to highlight the need to pay more attention to the specific affective and ambivalent framings of familial and national belonging in the individual literary texts. The concentration on the sphere of familial feeling highlights important points of rupture (aside from the diverse aesthetic projects) that the larger scope of Doyle’s emphasis on the “liberty plot” threatens to brush over.
65. While Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin suggest to use the term “postcolonial”, “to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the

moment of colonization to the present day” (2002: 2), their very persuasive argumentation that the coinciding of the “development of English as a privileged academic subject” and “the growth of Empire” (2002: 3) in the nineteenth century affected the increasing success of resistant postcolonial or so-called New English Literatures in the formerly colonised territories somewhat obstructs the view on earlier English transatlantic writing preceding independence. So, while nineteenth-century (and contemporary) literature is often analysed in postcolonial literary studies, the connection to the earlier debate on slavery in the eighteenth century has only been addressed more recently.

66. For a more elaborate critique of the temporal and spatial connotations of the term “postcolonial”, cf. McClintock (1995: 10–14).
67. While undoubtedly Aravamudan’s study is one of the most relevant critiques of Watt’s thesis and an important extension of Said’s argument to further eighteenth-century studies, his corollary that this Enlightenment Orientalism amounts to an alternative “cosmopolitanism” (2012: 7) appears somewhat too optimistic. He claims, “Ethnic identities at this time were still fluid, racializing yet not rigidly racist” (2012: 12). I will discuss the need to be careful of uncritical applications of terms such as “race” in relation to texts like *Robinson Crusoe* (and the work of George Boulukos, Daniel Carey, and Roxann Wheeler is extremely instructive in this regard). Nonetheless, rather than propose a clear separation between nineteenth-century biological (rigid) racism and earlier forms of (fluid) Othering (as Aravamudan does), the focus on the history of slavery, I argue, promotes an understanding of shifting forms of racialisation that both produce very material consequences. Boulukos, too, emphasises that institutionalised racial oppression precedes nineteenth-century scientific racism and puts forward the thesis that the discourse of amelioration common in the 1760s in legal hearings as well as in sentimental fiction like Sarah Scott’s *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1996 [1766]) (preceding the abolitionist discourse of the 1780s) paradoxically underscore a differential view, “implying that Africans are somehow less human, less endowed with reason and feeling, than Europeans” (2008: 140). This ties in with later biological conceptions of race and the shift from the mentioned concept of monogenesis to nineteenth-century polygenesis (Boulukos 2008: 10–16). More recently, it is specifically medievalists, such as Geraldine Heng (2015) and Beatrice Michaelis (2014), who show that a reworking of race as an analytical (rather than ontological) category can do important epistemological work, even if applied purposely anachronistically.
68. This demand, to look at the entangled or related literary discourses, is, of course, not new and Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler had already urged scholars to rethink the postcolonial research agenda in 1997 to anal-

- yse “how both colonies and metropolises shared in the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion” (1997: 3).
69. Homi Bhabha’s widely applied (and by now also criticised) concepts of hybridity and mimicry (cf. Bhabha 1994, critically, for example, Young 1995; Brah and Coombes 2000) seem not always to do justice to the simultaneity of different cultures and while he notes the menace of mimicry there is a clear directionality implied. Despite the fact that Bhabha himself emphasises that there is *no* stable original culture, it becomes difficult in his reasoning to envision an outside of colonial discourse or a colonial discourse that can come into being only in entanglement or equi-primordially with other histories and is not antecedent to them.
  70. Accordingly, I will have to (and can) say less about these aspects with regard to the Americas—and other regional contexts, such as Canada, the French-speaking and Spanish-speaking world, which undoubtedly also offer rich conflicting accounts of familial belonging in the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century.
  71. Tone could also be framed as an “attitude” that the text transpires (and might thus produce a specific mood in its readers, which we can however only speculate about). Genette’s understanding of “mood” is based mainly on the “regulation of narrative information” according to distance and perspective (cf. 1983 [1972]: 161–211; 1990 [1983]: 41–43). In what he calls an “ontology of literature” Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht in turn links “tone”, “atmosphere”, and the German term “Stimmung”, which evokes associations with mood, climate, and the human singing voice (2012: 2–5). However, in contrast to his explicitly ahistorical and apolitical emphasis on the open connection of prosody and affect (as a counter model to representation), I understand tonality as deeply enmeshed with the realm of political feelings. I do not think that aesthetics necessarily can be reduced to identarian logics of representation, but I am also deeply sceptical of assuming aesthetic immediacy because, as Hemmings earlier quoted critique of Massumi highlights, aesthetics itself is deeply invested in an idea that some bodies are already overdetermined affectively, as is most obvious in the sentimental spectacle of the “suffering slave”.
  72. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye speaks of “tragic” and “comic” fictional modes (1973).
  73. I am therefore expanding the notion of tonality used in music and painting as explained in the Oxford English Dictionary: “1. *Music*. a. The relation, or sum of relations, between the tones or notes of a scale or musical system; [...] a particular scale or system of tones. [...] 2. *Painting*. The quality of a painting in respect of tone; the general tone or colour-scheme of a picture” (“tonality, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed 26 September 2019).



74. Marcus Wood (2002) discusses the representation of slavery in relation to pornography.
75. For an overview of these debates, cf. Haschemi Yekani et al. (2013).
76. This paragraph draws on a previously published paper written together with Beatrice Michaelis. Cf. Michaelis and Haschemi Yekani (2014).
77. Judith Butler elaborates on the ethical implications of the process of becoming a recognisable subject. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler writes, “An account of oneself is always given to another, whether conjured or existing, and this other establishes the scene of address as a more primary ethical relation than a reflexive effort to give an account of oneself. Moreover, the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making. They are social in character, and they establish social norms, a domain of unfreedom and substitutability within which our ‘singular’ stories are told” (2005: 21).

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PART I

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1719–1807: Moral Sentiment and the  
Abolition of the Slave Trade



## CHAPTER 2

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# Foundations: Defoe and Equiano

Novels about the daily lives of everyday people became foundational in how modern subjects used reading and writing prose as an aesthetic resource in constructing an individual identity.<sup>1</sup> This rested to no small degree on the representation of “authentic” emotionality. Rather than reduce this form of “familial feeling” to descriptions of domesticity, I have argued in the introduction that the emergence of Britishness and the English novel is entangled in processes of transnational demarcation. Modernity itself is the product of how subjectivity is narrated as individual interiority, a process which, while making some subjects more familiar, also dehumanises Others. The writings of Daniel Defoe and Olaudah Equiano share a recourse to formal realism which is foundational for establishing such a feeling of familiarity with “ordinary” literary characters and their contact with others/Others. As has been outlined in relation to Ian Watt’s seminal 1957 *The Rise of the Novel*, in which he positions *Robinson Crusoe* famously as the “first” novel, the aesthetics of formal realism are characterised by detailed description of psychological interiority and are connected to the rise of Protestant religiosity, a belief in the emerging modern market economy and the so-called *homo economicus*. Supplementing Watt’s account, in which he stresses the myth of the solitary self-made man, I argue that the rise of formal realism is better understood when we contrast Defoe’s infatuation with the adventure of unchallenged agency with Equiano’s struggles for mutual recognition. Accordingly, in this chapter, I want to propose a transatlantic entangled

view on how the foundational tone of creating familiarity/familiality is established. In other words, by reading the fictional white Englishman's narrated self-reflexivity of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* together with Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*,<sup>2</sup> the first substantial believable self-representation of a Black (British) life,<sup>3</sup> as part of an entangled claim to modernity, it becomes apparent that the insular adventures of Crusoe lack realistic representations of interpersonal interaction and that the life story of the formerly enslaved Equiano<sup>4</sup> is, in fact, much more representative of how intersubjective recognition establishes commonality.<sup>5</sup>

We can also understand their accounts as entangled because, in line with my earlier explanations, this tone of modern subjectivity is deeply enmeshed in the realities of colonialism and the history of race and slavery which both texts address extensively. In Defoe's 1719 novel, slavery, while not completely racialised, is never really questioned, as opposed to Equiano's autobiography, published in the year of the French Revolution 1789, which serves as a central document in the abolitionist campaign. It is exactly within this period of seventy years between them that Englishness as a national identity is consolidated, while slavery as the supposedly natural economic order of things is disputed, albeit not yet abolished.<sup>6</sup> Both national identity formation and the debate on slavery are thus not coincidental in the rise of the novel genre. Accordingly, I will address aesthetic convergences and divergences in the foundational tone of the two narratives.

Both texts are characterised by an interrogation of the heroes' moral decisions as well as a general temporal framework of retrospectively assessing one's life. But, despite this structural similarity, the consequences are radically different. Defoe in solipsistic colonial fashion makes the exotic familiar. While depicting a modern self-reflexive mind, it is rendered as fantastically omnipotent and exclusively English. Here the claim to individuality comes in the guise of self-aggrandisement. Equiano, in turn, claims Britishness as more expansive, a feeling of belonging that caters to a conception of inclusivity. Both thus use the foundational aesthetics of prose writing to offer forms of identification but achieve different ends regarding familial feeling. In *The Antinomies of Realism*, Fredric Jameson explains, "What we call realism will thus come into being in the symbiosis of this pure form of storytelling with impulses of scenic elaboration, description and above all affective investment" (2013: 11). What Jameson describes here as "affective investment" can be easily associated with what

I have been calling “familial feeling” and this is where the actual family does play a role in the texts after all.

While both protagonists develop an emotive claim to Britishness, the representation of feelings remains somewhat stifled. For Crusoe, the flight from familial obligations is part of the narrative appeal of his adventurous account. For Equiano, in turn, claiming emotionality in relation to his lost African family is instrumental in the process of being recognised as human. Moreover, their constructions of masculinity are spatially distinct. While Equiano’s “oceanic” identity is mostly formed in movement on the sea, Crusoe’s “insular” version seems to fend off any form of Otherness. Hence, whilst aesthetically their projects of claiming subjectivity are entangled via their recourse to formal realism, their “affective investment” differs quite radically. If we take Bakhtin’s model of dialogicity, the inclusion of different voices or viewpoints (which we could understand as yet another aspect of entanglement), into consideration, which I will as an additional tool to revise Watt’s understanding of the emerging genre of the novel in this chapter, then Equiano’s text surely is more dialogic or “novelistic”.

But picking up from my initially voiced critique of the idea of “writing back” to the canon, I also want to caution against a simple reversal of which text should be considered the “first” true novel. By emphasising entangled tonalities, I want to disturb or queer the order and the locations from which British familiarity was constructed to provincialise the national account of how the English novel rose to fame. As the current debates in eighteenth-century studies show, it is much more useful to pluralise rather than assume exceptional foundations of “modern” forms of writing.

### INSULAR MASCULINITY: DANIEL DEFOE’S *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

The foundational tone of modernity to a large degree rests on the believability of a unique life story and is initially less dependent on a clear demarcation between factual versus fictional writing. On publication, *Robinson Crusoe* was advertised as a travelogue in the preface in the following terms: “The editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it” (RC 3). Fiction here is still associated with dishonesty and unseemly personal vanity, which the religious instructive account is to avoid by all means. Whether contemporaries believed the

autobiographical fiction of the work is secondary for its role in establishing formal realism, or “credible prose narratives”, as Gallagher (2006: 339) calls it. The believability of this “private man’s adventures” (RC 3) as paradoxically both particular and universal means that it transcended the need to be factual for it to be believable. The novel functions as an allegory for a new form of middle-class identity with everyman Robinson Crusoe coming across as a person who could have actually lived. Formal realism is established via detailed descriptions of daily routines, surroundings, and contemplation that were also regarded as educational.<sup>7</sup> Crusoe’s self-reflexive musings mainly revolve around his “original sin” (RC 154) of disobeying his father and around religious introspection on providence.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the text is also appealing because of its adventurous encounters with Otherness. Crusoe thus in many ways is also part of the construction of a modern English subject that is increasingly understood as racially (and nationally) distinct from non-white Others. At the same time, Crusoe’s relation to other people closer to home and especially his family remains surprisingly anti-social and unfeeling.

In his study on narrative and domestic relations in the British novel, Christopher Flint argues convincingly, “For Defoe, the urge to define character required family background, but the desire to fantasize about the unbounded potential of the individual demanded a suppression of familial discourse” (1998: 119). Characteristically then while the family background of the protagonist is established in the beginning of the narrative, he quickly escapes the confines of his original home. Not being content with the “middle station of life” (RC 6) and due to his limited prospects as the third son, Robinson Crusoe sets off to his well-known ill-fated adventures on his own. Against his father’s advice and without his consent, the eighteen-year-old leaves home and does not learn a trade. This causes his mother, in one of the few instances that she is mentioned at all in the text, “great passion” (RC 8). Fleeing from parental expectations, it is specifically travelling and transcultural contact that abets the transformation of Robinson Kreutznaer, whose father is a German immigrant from Bremen after all, to become the English entrepreneur Robinson Crusoe. Before elaborating on what Flint succinctly has called “the visible absence of the family” (1998: 119), I will therefore trace the status of race and slavery in *Robinson Crusoe*, which have traditionally been at the forefront of postcolonial readings of the novel, and discuss these topics in relation to the often assumed modern dialogicity of the text that I want to contest.



The legacy of feudalism, fittingly described as “the life of slavery for daily bread” (RC 6), is still palpable at the beginning of Crusoe’s narrative and even though the emerging capitalist middle-class, or middle ranks to be more precise, can consolidate a new comfortable life in England, this is not enough for young Crusoe, which is where demarcations between self and Other gain prominence. Precisely the extent to which this eighteenth-century imagination of seventeenth-century<sup>9</sup> colonial Others translates into a language of race is still under scrutiny. I follow Roxann Wheeler’s findings in her comprehensive study, *The Complexion of Race*, where she speaks of “residual proto-racial ideologies” (2000: 9) that are articulated through and with other contemporary markers of difference that include Christianity, civility, and rank (Wheeler 2000: 7). This in turn helps account for the, again in Wheeler’s terms, “situated multiplicity” (2000: 45) of race at the time. Accordingly, while I use the term race<sup>10</sup> in relation to an eighteenth-century source, I do so in what Jeffrey Cohen calls a deliberately “untimely” (2000: 2) manner. Race is thus deployed as a heuristic category, precisely to challenge those postcolonial readings that all too quickly read racialised literary characters such as Friday (but also Othello and Oroonoko) within a framework of scientific racism and the biologised black and white binary.<sup>11</sup> Bearing in mind such a heuristic understanding of race as emerging in a web of multiple meanings, we can, following Defoe’s plot, I believe assert that English national identity is gradually racialised as white in *Robinson Crusoe* through manifold demarcations: from Muslimness in North Africa and the Blackness of the West Africans, to the nudity of the natives, and the “barbarity” of the cannibals in the Caribbean. But, Englishness is also consolidated as benevolent against the so-called “‘black legend’ of Spanish cruelty” in inner-European national colonial rivalries (Boulukos 2008: 14; Wood 2002: 5; cf. RC 136). Hence, while race is not considered a biological given yet, that does not amount to the absence of racialising colour-codings.

What is more, in the early eighteenth century, not only race, but also slavery<sup>12</sup> is still a category of multiplicity. Boulukos explains that “[u]ntil at least the mid-eighteenth century the terms ‘slave’ and ‘servant’ could still be used interchangeably for English indentured servants and African slaves in metropolitan discourse, and likely also in the colonies” (2008: 119). Enslaved by Corsairs in Morocco on his third voyage,<sup>13</sup> Crusoe muses about missing a British “fellow-slave” to plan his escape: there was “no *Englishman*, *Irishman*, or *Scotsman*” (RC 18), which shows the relative regularity of white men from the British Isles being taken captive.

These first two years of isolation in North Africa, in which he pleases himself “with the imagination”, foreshadow his later insular fate. Eventually Crusoe meets the young boy Xury. In contrast to the Moroccan Muslims, who are referred to as “Moors”, Xury is labelled a “*Maresco*” (RC 18), which denotes Spanish, that is European, Muslims at the time. The Spanish were perceived, as mentioned, if not as Black, then definitely as Blacker than the English. Wheeler argues, “The category of the slave is not exclusively reserved for Africans, nor is it represented as a permanent state for either Crusoe or Xury” (1995: 834). While initially sharing the same fate, Crusoe can finally escape captivity and takes the young boy with him on condition that he serve him from then on (cf. RC 20–21). Despite being European, Xury’s non-Christianness makes him a legitimate item of exchange in Crusoe’s capitalist ventures in which religion, nationality, and racialising discourses are entangled. He sells Xury to the Portuguese Captain for sixty Pieces of Eight, twenty less than he gets for his boat. But, there is a marked temporal difference to chattel slavery as Xury’s servitude is finite should he convert to Christianity after ten years.<sup>14</sup> Crusoe, despite being implicated in the already quite institutionalised transatlantic trade,<sup>15</sup> constantly highlights the singularity of his endeavours which is of course also a literary strategy of establishing individuality. In the logic of the narrative, this is not an established global framework of seafaring, trade, and slavery, but rather, Crusoe’s unique (life) journey in finding his identity (and eventually repenting his filial sins). This is also connected to the descriptions of landscape that Anja Schwarz reads as part of a strangely anachronistic temporality of re-enacting discovery, as a claiming of “virgin” land after the fact: “In rendering this landscape devoid of Europeans, Defoe curiously disavows slavery (which nevertheless significantly shapes other elements of his story) in order to enact, in these early scenes, the beginning of a European history of discovery” (2008: 129). In this way, the novel itself narrates the co-existence of forms of race-independent indentured servitude and the rise of the transatlantic plantation economy which increasingly racialises slavery.<sup>16</sup> Free again, Crusoe is subsequently taken to Brazil and immediately invests in a sugar plantation actively seeking African enslaved labour. Finally, shipwrecked on the supposedly uninhabited Caribbean island on the mission to buy more slaves, Crusoe lives self-sufficiently for more than twenty-five years before meeting another human being again.

Gradual self-reflexivity and insularity are characteristic of these early passages set on the island, in which Crusoe begins to “consider seriously

[his] condition” (RC 53). The time on the island follows a peculiar form of narrated temporality. On the one hand, there is the distinctive realistic description of routine and detail and, on the other hand, there are massive accelerations and temporal compressions when years and years in story-time are summed up in only a few words of narrative discourse. Compare the following short paragraph that describes how Crusoe fortifies his abode that appears as if it were one ongoing action, but, in fact, covers a period of more than a year:

I have already described my habitation, which was a tent under the side of a rock, surrounded with a strong pale of posts and cables, but I might now rather call it a wall, for I rais’d a kind of wall up against it of turfs, about two foot thick on the out-side, and after some time, I think it was a year and a half, I rais’d rafters from it leaning to the rock, and thatch’d or cover’d it with boughs of trees, and such things as I could get to keep out the rain, which I found at some times of the year very violent. (RC 55)

While he minutely details the exact thickness of the wall, the period of one and a half years is a rough guess. The timeline in the novel seems so confusing at times that it does not come as a surprise that the title of the book specifies the actual period of twenty-eight years spent on the island as this is not immediately apparent from reading the described actions.<sup>17</sup> The long periods of Crusoe’s solitude, of course, additionally pose one of the greatest challenges in linguistically representing individuality since there is no interpersonal interaction. It is the ritualistic performance of tasks as well as the world-making function of writing (in the form of a text within a text) that fills this void. Dating his sojourn in his journal, Crusoe can increasingly consult with his own thoughts and by extension the readers are invited into this represented interiority as “I poor miserable *Robinson Crusoe*” (RC 57) reflects upon his fate and his relationship to God. The temporal orientation of the novel thus functions both retrospectively, the whole account is a recollection of the mature self of his sinful youthful (mis)conduct, and, at the same time, it is prospective in its narrative expectation of evermore things to do, apprehensions, and adventures. Steadily, Crusoe manages to “tame” the landscape, to grow crops, and finally to find a first companion:

I saw abundance of parrots, and fain I would have caught one, if possible, to have kept it to be tame, and taught it to speak to me. I did, after some pains

taking, catch a young parrot, for I knock'd it down with a stick, and having recover'd it, I brought it home; but it was some years before I could make him speak: However, at last I taught him to call me by name very familiarly [...]. (RC 87)

This episode not only narrates the violence in domesticating the animal that needs to be “knock'd down”, it again includes a large time lapse of “some years” that is in fact also a prolepsis as Crusoe specifies that he is currently only in his third year on the island shortly afterwards (cf. RC 91). In Crusoe's summary at this point, the ordeal of teaching the bird appears as one swift operation from capture to familiarity, which is accomplished only years later. As a result of these educational efforts, communication on the island is no longer confined to the written page of the journal, but is now enhanced by the sonic dimension of words being said back to him with names taking on a special significance: “I diverted myself with talking to my parrot, and teaching him to speak, and I quickly learn'd him to know his own name, and at last to speak it out pretty loud POLL, which was the first word I ever heard spoken in the island by any mouth but my own” (RC 95). While the written discourse of the journal functions as a means of self-reflection, the spoken word of the parrot has no apparent content other than to reflect what Crusoe would like to hear. Later Friday fulfils a similar role, but in contrast to the animal, he is granted some influence on Crusoe's identity formation, albeit often in narrator summary rather than in direct speech. This is crucial in relation to the idea of dialogicity that I will come back to.

For the time being and in the absence of a human companion, Crusoe becomes his own externalised object of entertainment: “I spent whole hours, I may say whole days, in representing to myself in the most lively colours, how I must have acted, if I had got nothing out of the ship” (RC 104). This vivid speculation of an individual mind on different possible futures, which reads almost like an anticipation of audio-visual media, can be understood as a comment on the increasing relevance of literature as a new form of pleasurable and exciting speculation. It is not only religious introspection, but reflection on an average individual's actions, that characterise the novelty of prose fiction at the time and which Crusoe's reflections mirror. Finally, after long periods of solitude, Crusoe is confronted with the presence of another human being in the shocking sighting of the footprint fifteen years after he landed on the island. Consequently, but long before the actual appearance of the natives on his shore only three

years later, Crusoe becomes prospectively preoccupied by apprehensions about the assumed cannibals<sup>18</sup> close by (cf. RC 99). In this context, his parrot Poll plays a crucial role once more when it startles and wakes him in calling out his shortened name: “*Robin, Robin, Robin Crusoe*, poor *Robin Crusoe*, where are you *Robin Crusoe*? [...] [E]ven though I knew it was the parrot, and that indeed it could be no body else, it was a good while before I could compose myself” (RC 113–114). In contrast to Friday, who must address Crusoe as “Master”, the parrot is taught to repeat the (shortened) proper name, one characteristic of the new novel form after all. The appellation is qualified in the animal’s repetition of Crusoe’s own bemoaning of his sorry state by the constant addition of the adjective “poor” to his name. This marker can obviously also be read in relation to Crusoe’s role as a self-made man.

Famously described by Watt as a *homo economicus*, Crusoe becomes the hero of “economic individualism” (Watt 2000 [1957]: 62). Despite his reflections on his lack of use for money on the island, he tellingly takes the coins he finds on the ship anyway (cf. RC 47). To overcome his lonesome fate, “poor” Robinson not only has to leave the island, he must also accumulate wealth. When the Portuguese Captain, who generously took care of his plantation, quite unrealistically happily hands over the financial gains after such a long period, Crusoe decides to sell the plantation to a considerable profit in the end (cf. RC 238–239). Accordingly, Overton (1992: 4) links the construction of the self to the making of a fortune in the narrative. But before this felicitous turn of events, Crusoe literally must “find himself” with the bird relentlessly calling on him, “Where are you? Where have you been? How come you here?” (RC 113). Eric Jager emphasises an effect of self-alienation in response to the parrot’s address in this scene:

Hearing his own words unexpectedly repeated back to him by the parrot [...], Crusoe becomes more of an other to himself than he really wants to be: to read the words “poor miserable Robinson Crusoe” in his journal is self-composing, but to hear the words “poor Robin Crusoe” spoken unexpectedly by another is not. Crusoe’s “othered” voice frightens and threatens him much like the sign of the other by which he is shortly thereafter “surpriz’d”—the human footprint. (1988: 326–327)

Consequently, the presence of someone else to whom he must relate becomes increasingly menacing. Any form of sociality is not the longed-for deliverance from his loneliness: as an isolated white man in this region,

he fears the Otherness of those surrounding him. The mentioned fateful sighting of the footprint (cf. RC 122) causes him to feel like a “frighted hare”, his “fright” keeps him from sleeping, apprehension and fancy take over his thoughts, and he is “embarrass’d with [his] own frightful ideas” (RC 122). Rather than efficiently manage his surroundings as before, he now must cope with his inner unsettlement.

Fancies and reflections become a means to mimic reality, much like the novel itself becomes an entertaining vessel to describe supposedly mundane events and speculate about the not quite so ordinary. After spotting the cannibals from afar, Crusoe has a dream which foreshadows his acquiring a servant (cf. RC 157).<sup>19</sup> And accordingly, upon finally saving a man native to the islands from the cannibals who visit from the neighbouring shore for their gruesome rituals, the man supposedly willingly submits to Crusoe: he “laid his head upon the ground, and taking me by the foot, set my foot upon his head; this, it seems, was in token for swearing to be my slave for ever” (RC 161). Crusoe’s approach to land and people is similar. He first “turns the *terra nullius* of his island into private property” (Schwarz 2008: 138) and in the same logic claims the native as “his man”. This comprises an acculturation to English normative conceptions in both cases. While Crusoe has lost his family of origin, he can magically accommodate and translate the alien surrounding and people into terms that are immediately familiar (to him and his readers), for example, by calling his different abodes on the island by epithets such as “country-house” and “sea-coast-house” (RC 82). Flint elucidates, “The point of these designations is, of course, familiarity; Crusoe reacts almost immediately to a hostile and desolate environment as if he had only to transform it into an English estate in order to survive” (1998: 126). Friday, too, is quickly turned into an object of both subjugation and instruction in the familiar modes of Christianity and enlightened education. In stark contrast to Xury’s temporally limited services, it also appears to be evident that Friday is permanently bound to him.

Initially, not sharing a language, it is the body of the native that is read as communicating submission unambiguously. The initial quoted ritualistic subjection of bowing down in front of the Englishman is repeated once more in the text:

At last he lays his head flat upon the ground, close to my foot, and sets my other foot upon his head, as he had done before; and after this, made all the signs to me of subjection, servitude, and submission imaginable, to let me

know, how he would serve me as long as he liv'd; I understood him in many things, and let him know, I was very well pleas'd with him; in a little time I began to speak to him, and teach him to speak to me; and first, I made him know his name should be *Friday*, which was the day I sav'd his life; I call'd him so for the memory of the time; I likewise taught him to say *Master*, and then let him know that was to be my name [...]. (RC 162–163)

In the hyperbolic alliteration of “subjection, servitude, and submission” Crusoe reads into the described gesture indefinite service—despite the still common eighteenth-century system of temporary servitude that he himself had experienced earlier. This once more points to the strange narration of temporality in the novel, the lifelong submission is communicated and settled in the split-second of the native laying down, while it takes “a little time” to translate this into the language of *Master* and *Friday*. Thus strikingly, submission precedes the actual means to communicate in a shared language. Moreover, Yahav (2008: 43) highlights the differential narration of duration before and after Crusoe meets Friday regarding the uneven distribution of relatively little discourse time dealing with the first unaccompanied twenty-five years on the island in contrast to the final three years in which they “liv'd there together perfectly and compleately happy” (RC 174). However, while the second scene of subjection describes the adoption of the title “Master” by Crusoe and the seemingly random naming of the Carib by the day of the week that marks their encounter, “for the memory of the time”, and which can be connected to Crusoe’s earlier adoption of a calendar to bring temporal order and routine into his otherwise frightening and potentially infinite insular life, it is in the earlier scene that Friday is called a “slave” explicitly for the first and only time in the novel. Mostly he is referred to as “my man” and a “servant” (RC 220) and there is now a debate between eighteenth-century and postcolonial scholars about the status of Friday’s subjugation in relation to the master-slave dialectic. Before going into more detail, it is instructive to revisit the famous description of Friday’s appearance, which I will quote at some length because of its significance for an understanding of the mentioned emergence of racialised difference:

He was a comely handsome fellow, perfectly well made, with straight strong limbs, not too large; tall and well shap'd, and, as I reckon, about twenty six years of age. He had a very good countenance, not a fierce and surly aspect, but seem'd to have something very manly in his face, and yet he had all the

sweetness and softness of an *European* in his countenance too, especially when he smil'd. His hair was long and black, not curl'd like wool; his forehead very high, and large, and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes. The colour of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny; and yet not of an ugly yellow nauseous tawny, as the *Brasilians*, and *Virginians*, and other natives of *America* are; but of a bright kind of a dun olive colour, that had in it something very agreeable, tho' not very easy to describe. His face was round and plump; his nose small, not flat like the Negroes, a very good mouth, thin lips, and his fine teeth well set, and white as ivory. (RC 162)

This well-known passage, in essence, emphatically states that Friday is different in every possible way from a racialised derogative understanding of Blackness that is reserved for the term "Negroe": he has straight hair, lighter olive-coloured skin,<sup>20</sup> and a small nose; and the fact that the opposite attributes are considered to be negative attests to emerging racist classifications, which increasingly frame Blackness as aesthetically displeasing and intellectually inferior.<sup>21</sup> Like Behn's (2003 [1688]) Oroonoko, his features are even favourably compared to those of a European. In the Americas, there is a spectrum of non-whiteness including the "tawny" complexion of the "*Brasilians*, and *Virginians*, and other natives". This also shows that slavery is not yet linked to an idea of hereditary chattel slavery based on race as a fixed category. Both Friday's skin colour, which is "not very easy to describe", and his masculinity, wavering between manliness and softness, cannot be classified in a straightforward binary manner, thus, linking racial ambiguity to a certain degree of gender trouble. Nonetheless, there is a clear hierarchy from darker to lighter complexions.

Interestingly, Crusoe, in turn, is described as "white"<sup>22</sup> mostly from Friday's point of view, for instance, when Friday reports of the Spanish who are "white bearded men" like Crusoe:

He told me, that [...] W. from their country, there dwelt white bearded men, like me, and pointed to my great whiskers, which I mention'd before; and that they had kill'd *much mans*, that was his word; by all which I understood, he meant the *Spaniards*, whose cruelties in *America* had been spread over the whole countries, and was remember'd by all the nations from father to son. (RC 170)

Lighter skin colour and beardedness then are considered signs of Europeanness and uncontested masculinity. Friday construes a similarity



between Crusoe and the Spanish on account of their looks, but Crusoe immediately distinguishes his English identity from the cruel “Black” Spanish. So, while to a certain degree, Friday’s views are incorporated into the narrative, they are almost always conveyed through Crusoe’s speech, except for the supposedly amusing emphasis on the faulty “much mans”, which “was his word”, and is quickly corrected by his “Master”. Whereas the Spanish and the English could indeed be conflated as looking the same from a non-European point of view, the discursive construction of a racially unifying white identity is undermined by an emphasis on national distinction and Spanish barbarity. In other words, colour-codings of Friday as darker and naturally inferior to the lighter Englishman are considered a given in the logic of the text, but race is not yet ossified, and it seems that throughout the story, Crusoe’s nationality and his religion are the most important identity forming elements, especially in relation to other Europeans. Hence, the debate about Friday’s status as a “grateful slave” (cf. Boulukos 2008) in *Robinson Crusoe* I believe needs to be sutured to reflections on racial multiplicity. On a metatextual level, one can also relate the master-slave debate to the notion of dialogicity and how Crusoe’s relationship to Friday affects his self-understanding. Critical opinion, as stated, is divided: while postcolonial scholars like Peter Hulme stress the muting of the native voice and Friday’s status as a slave,<sup>23</sup> others, like John Richetti and Daniel Carey (cf. 2009: 121), highlight reciprocity. Richetti identifies the modernity of the novel specifically in Crusoe’s lengthy reflections on cannibalism which he reads as “pure dialogism” (2000: 344) in the Bakhtinian sense.

Following Mikhail Bakhtin’s influential framing of novelisation, the novel, in contrast to the monologic world-view of the epic, is polyphonic. Different voices, for example, the speech of the narrator and the characters, are in a dialogic relationship, embodying different world views in different registers. More precisely, Bakhtin juxtaposes “intention of the character” with “intention of the author” (1994: 324) in a way that might not yet fully match a poststructuralist decentring of meaning but is still relevant for an understanding of modern dialogicity. Significantly, Bakhtin concedes, even individual utterances by characters are considered double-voiced, or “internally dialogized” (1994: 324) in themselves. He associates this not only with a comedic or parodic debunking of meaning, but with a more fundamental self-reflexiveness of language in the novel. In this logic, the foundational tone of modernity in novelistic discourse then

is expressed by a subject who is in dialogue with itself. And indeed, this correlates directly with Defoe's depiction of Robinson Crusoe.

In the process of travelling, Crusoe recognises the tension between similarity and difference, which can also quickly change as in his relationship to Xury who is first understood as similar and then hierarchically marked as different (not only through religion, but also age). Even before the mentioned first encounter with Friday, it is the often-discussed and for Richetti central passage on cannibalism that exemplifies Crusoe's capacity for dialogue. While at first it is outright disgust that he feels when he speculates about the anthropophagic natives, Crusoe slowly interrogates his own truth and becomes much more relative in his opinions: "I began with cooler and calmer thoughts to consider what it was I was going to engage in. What authority or call I had, to pretend to be judge and executioner upon these men as criminals, whom Heaven had thought fit for so many ages to suffer unpunish'd [...]." Consequently, he rethinks his initial plan to attack the invaders and wonders

what right I had to engage in the quarrel of that blood, which they shed promiscuously one upon another. I debated this very often with my self thus; how do I know what God himself judges in this particular case; [...]. They do not know it to be an offence, and then commit it in defiance of divine justice, as we do in almost all the sins we commit. They think it no more a crime to kill a captive taken in war, than we do to kill an ox; nor to eat human flesh, than we do to eat mutton. (RC 135)

Crusoe (frequently) debates with himself and comes to the realisation that he cannot adopt the position of the judge of these men if God himself does not punish them and apparently in their moral universe, a form of cannibalism is permissible. Following this introspection, Crusoe, Richetti argues,

not only thinks but dramatizes the conditions of thought, narrates the function of thinking within his personal development, and defines himself as a mind making its way through a series of positions, each of which has a distinct validity and personal rightness for him at different points in his experience. Or in Bakhtin's terms we might want to say that he locates his personality at the intersection of competing explanations, rational, emotional, historical, political, of cannibalism, with his own personal situation as the lone European inhabitant of the island. (2000: 341)

From this he concludes that “Crusoe’s reflections are cross-cultural, for him a revelation of tolerant relativity” (Richetti 2000: 342). While I share Richetti’s classification of Crusoe as self-reflexive about his status as a European and Christian in a foreign setting, I would draw a different conclusion. His self-interrogation does not necessarily amount to “tolerant relativity” since his morally superior position is never really questioned; he simply learns humility in the sense that he relegates the authority to judge the cannibals to *his* God, he accepts that it is not for him to judge in relation to the higher divine power.

Later, with regard to *his* subjects on *his* island, he is more than happy to assume the position of the uncontested monarch and ruler. Richetti, in fact, too, admits that in the novel we find a “dialogue with himself” about how to come to terms with cultural alterity (2000: 344). Literally, Crusoe “debates with himself”. Moreover, shortly after his display of moral tolerance towards the cannibals, Crusoe immediately contrasts his insight once more with the backward “conduct of the *Spaniards* in all their barbarities practis’d in *America*” (RC 136). The abhorrence against these barbarous Europeans, as which Protestant Crusoe marks the Catholics recurrently, is also clearly then a new form of inner-European and Christian distinction, that differentiates in colour-coded language the “whiter” Europeans of the North from the “Blacker” ones in the South. In Defoe’s writing we can identify a new form of foundational self-reflexivity that challenges the position of an individual in relation to his God *and* that faces cultural alterity. However, this cultural alterity for the most part functions as a form of gratuitous obstacle that Crusoe, clearly an adventurer more than an ethnographer, simply needs to bring under his control.

Therefore, in Crusoe’s relationship to Friday, true dialogicity is more difficult to assert: As mentioned, Crusoe uses language mainly to teach Friday to obey his orders and except for some short direct quotes of Friday’s characteristic faulty English interspersed in Crusoe’s summaries of Friday’s actions, there is very little direct speech<sup>24</sup> except in a central dialogue again on the role of cannibalism. This passage, almost like a short playtext within the novel, assigns the characters their speaking roles as “Master” and “Friday”:

*Master*, Well, *Friday*, and what does your nation do with the men they take, do they carry them away, and eat them, as these did?

*Friday*, Yes, my nation eat man’s too, eat all up.

*Master*, Where do they carry them?

*Friday*, Go to other place where they think.

*Master*, Do they come hither?

*Friday*, Yes, yes, they come hither; come other else place.

*Master*, Have you been here with them?

*Friday*, Yes, I have been here; [points to the N. W. side of the island, which it seems was their side.]

By this I understood, that my man *Friday* had formerly been among the savages, who us'd to come on shore on the farther part of the island, on the same man eating occasions that he was now brought for; and some time after, when I took the courage to carry him to that side, [...] he presently knew the place, and told me, he was there once when they eat up twenty men, two women, and one child; he could not tell twenty in *English*; but he numbered them by laying so many stones on a row, and pointing to me to tell them over. (RC 169)

As throughout the novel, there is never autonomy of Friday's speech, it cannot stand for itself or be regarded as communicating meaning without the focalizer and interlocutor Crusoe, who translates for the reader, "by this I understood" what *his* man means.

Friday's limited capabilities in mastering the complexities of the English language are underlined by his lacking ability to name the number twenty. Nonetheless, in what follows, Friday, in fact, teaches Crusoe about the locality, how to best use a canoe to reach the other island, and so on. But rather than establish some sort of equal footing between the two men, Crusoe also decides that Friday needs to be instructed in the one true religion. And while Jager (1988: 328) emphasises that it is Friday's interrogations in the process of conversion that make Crusoe a better Christian, Friday's interiority continues to be externally focalized by Crusoe in variations of the mentioned formulations such as "I found he meant" (RC 170). In the entire novel, there is a clear hierarchy at work; Friday readily accepts both Crusoe's intellectual superiority as his master as well as the pre-eminence of the Christian God over his "*Benamuckee*" (RC 171). This finally brings me back to the critical debate about Friday's contested status as a slave.

Carey stresses Friday's agency in voluntarily submitting to Crusoe and urges critics to grant predominance to the text itself. But, as there is no internal focalization, Carey, I would argue, to a certain degree here falls prey to the solipsistic perspective of the text, limiting epistemic authority to Crusoe's interpretation of Friday who is reduced to a mirroring function and what Hulme calls the fiction of voluntary servitude:<sup>25</sup>

Friday is certainly a slave inasmuch as he has no will of his own; and Crusoe, unwilling as he may be ever to call Friday “slave”, has no qualms about adopting the other half of the dialectic [...]. Yet within the fiction the term “slave” can be avoided because Friday’s servitude is voluntary, not forced. (Hulme 1992: 205)

Hulme convincingly associates the text with the unrealistic wish-fulfilment of the romance rather than the realism of the truly modern novel thus emphasising the hybridity of *Robinson Crusoe* as still wavering between older and newer forms of narrative fiction. On the one hand, Crusoe is a believable hero who reflects his position and needs to come to the eventual acceptance of the will of God. Friday, on the other hand, is granted no such narrative space that would suggest a “reflective” position of submitting to Robinson Crusoe. The narrative logic of wish-fulfilment characteristic of adventure writing is here combined with the more pious Protestant spiritual autobiography.

This generic hybridity of the novel is also evident in the lack of representation of familial feeling. The unrealistically unchallenged master-slave dialectic in some ways becomes a substitute for the patriarchal family that is so central in later novel writing. In relation to Friday, Crusoe adopts the position of the father. As Carey acknowledges, “The patriarchal self-conception consolidates a stratified social order composed of masters and servants tied by familial bonds” (Carey 2009: 121; cf. also Flint 1998: 137). While there is very little emotive attachment to family from start to finish in the novel, slavery is described in familiar terminologies of familial care, in considering Xury and Friday surrogate sons with Crusoe’s “near magical ability to induce filial gratitude without really deserving it” (Flint 1998: 128). But Friday, in his willing submission cannot only be linked to the position of child/servant, he is also constantly effeminised and pushed in the symbolic position of spouse, as Flint remarks, “he is providentially sent to Crusoe as Eve is to Adam” (1998: 142). While Martin Green briefly mentions the “strong (though innocent) erotic coloring” (1980: 76) of Friday, there is a more convenient sublimation of sexuality into business throughout the narrative. Quoting 1 John 2:16, Crusoe first states, “I was removed from all the wickedness of the world here: I had neither the *lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life*” (RC 102). But he then concedes that there were indeed a few items he wished for: “I had no room for desire, except it was of things which I had not” (RC 103) and the “trifles” that he specifies are the things that money cannot

buy him on the island such as seed for specific plants. Procreation is expressed as agriculture and desire is channelled into Crusoe's male Godly acts of creation on the island. All of Crusoe's transactions, be they with other people, who never show resistance, or monetary accumulation, in the end appear unrealistically felicitous and gratuitous to fully qualify as realistic novelistic discourse. Tellingly, the text, unlike Austen's and later Dickens's fiction, does not end in domestic closure of the marriage plot, but in the desire for ever more adventure (cf. Flint 1998: 143).

In the final pages of the novel, back in England, Crusoe quickly goes from having "no family" (RC 239) to taking care of two of his nephews to finally founding his own family.

In the mean time, I in part settled myself here; for first of all I marry'd, and that not either to my disadvantage or dissatisfaction, and had three children, two sons and one daughter: But my wife dying, and my nephew coming home with good success from a voyage to *Spain*, my inclination to go abroad, and his importunity prevailed, and engag'd me to go in his ship, as a private trader to the *East Indies*: This was in the year 1694. (RC 240)

Again, this time in a truly queer form of temporality, heterosexual procreation is limited to two sentences in the entire novel and no emotional attachment, except in the awkward double negative of "not either to my disadvantage or dissatisfaction", is narrated. The more than convenient death of the nameless wife and the inconsequential existence of his equally nameless children simply provide the opportunity for a continuation of the plot in the even more episodic structure of *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. These are advertised in the final passages of the book and were published quickly following the enormous success of the first instalment.<sup>26</sup>

In conclusion, the novel consolidates Crusoe as a free and, in comparison to various colonial and European Others, increasingly white English subject that is characterised by a new form of dialogic self-reflexivity, but not yet disturbed by a "(post)colonial" talking back or familial obligations. This early eighteenth-century "story of adventure, as Defoe tells it, is always built around an isolated individual, who leads subordinates against alien opponents" (Green 1980: 84). Crusoe might be the first psychological hero of the novel, but he is not yet truly a social subject.<sup>27</sup> While, as Defoe has demonstrated in his famous satirical poem "The True-Born Englishman" (1701), Englishness can incorporate many immigrant

elements, Scottish, Danish, and in Crusoe's case even German, it is only by leaving the British Isles that this identity is consolidated as superior to the colonised Others. So, in short, Friday's agency becomes unimaginable in a text that grants him no interiority: in toto, he functions like his predecessor the parrot. Some of the things he says might startle Crusoe and provoke contemplation, but it is also clear that a more radical challenge to this romanticised assumption of the master-slave dialectic is not imaginable. This again must be linked to David Hume's mocking of Francis Williams's poetry in a footnote to his essay "Of National Characters" as "slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly" (Hume 1987 [1742]: 208), as mentioned in the previous chapter.<sup>28</sup> The non-white man Friday, too, can only mimic familiarity and, tellingly, while the taming of the animal is built on force, the subordination of the Carib magically can do without. In this vein, Crusoe's story is not yet reflexive of the structural violence of the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, I want to suggest that aesthetically Defoe's text, which predates the abolitionist debate after all, can be read as entangled with the forms of writing that did eventually contest this fantasy of compliant mimicry. In the second half of the eighteenth century the first Black writers joined the ranks of writing subjects and this included writing in the foundational tone of providing believable interiority via the adoption of formal realism.

Thus, while there are many parallels between Crusoe's adventures and Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, there are also crucial differences in how modernity and Britishness can be claimed by these different protagonists. Both Equiano and Crusoe accept God as their ruler but change their destinies by not sticking to their initially allotted fate, which is a marker of their status as modern men and a characteristic of novelistic discourse—thus altering the script of modernity. But the family is far less dispensable for Equiano. While not taking up a lot of narrative space either, the severed family ties are not voluntary and do not result in narrative indulgence of free-floating individuality. During his tales of adventure and fancy that might seem akin to Crusoe, Equiano seeks familiarity with rather than dominance over the subjects he meets. His foundational tone is always in conversation with how others might perceive his actions, especially his assumed audience. But this does not mean that the text is pure flattery of white sensitivities. Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* can also be considered the first piece of writing that reflects about the otherness of white slaveholders from a Black point of view. Reading Defoe's and Equiano's texts as entangled accounts of foundational modernity, I will posit that rather

than dismiss Equiano as imitative of Defoe's novelistic style, the account of the former slave, characterised by constant negotiation, is, in fact, the more realistic depiction of a modern mercantile man. While Defoe settles for an insular version of English masculinity that largely rests on phantasmatic wish-fulfilment, Equiano provides a more believable account of a form of oceanic Britishness that benefits the ex-slave and the self-conception of the British as progressive and is thus truly dialogical.

### OCEANIC BRITISHNESS: OLAUDAH EQUIANO'S *THE INTERESTING NARRATIVE*

Generically Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* combines elements of the autobiography, the spiritual autobiography, and the genre of the apologia. The text, published first by subscription in 1789, can also be understood as a captivity narrative, travel book, or adventure story. As Aravamudan argues, "Equiano's work suggests both religious and secular consequences and, like slave narrative, refers back to a picaresque origin" (1999: 235). Especially its categorisation as a predecessor to the nineteenth-century slave narrative by Gates has cemented the *Narrative's* status as one of the most prominent pieces of early Black literature. It is also the most successful of the early Black Atlantic publications discussed in this book, with nine published editions and translations into Dutch, German, and Russian during Equiano's lifetime. Equiano is also the only of the four Black writers who can claim an intimate personal familiarity with the state of enslavement (Sancho was taken to England as a servant from a young age; Wedderburn's slave-owning father secured his freedom, and Seacole was already born a freewoman). More than the epistolary form of Sancho's writing and Wedderburn's pamphlet, Equiano (and Seacole after him) publishes a narrative that clearly already belongs to the realm of novelistic discourse. As Thomas Doherty argues, "The successful formula for a newly emergent literary form—the novel—proved readily adaptable to the novelistic dimensions of Equiano's life: a calibrated balance between piety and pathos, orthodox sentiment and wild adventure" (1997: 575).<sup>30</sup>

According to Equiano's own account, whose veracity has come under scrutiny,<sup>31</sup> he was kidnapped with his sister into slavery at the age of eleven, taken to Barbados and after a few days transported to Virginia. There he is



bought by a planter and then sold to Michael Henry Pascal, a lieutenant in the British Royal Navy who names him Gustavus Vassa after the Swedish king and takes him to England. Once there, Pascal breaks his promise to set him free and sells him into slavery once more to the West Indies in 1762 after serving in the Seven Years' War. Equiano eventually buys his freedom and travels more widely before settling in England for good. Subsequently, Equiano becomes the most prominent and professional Black spokesperson for abolition in Britain and tours widely with his "interesting" narrative. Douglas Anderson speculates about the different dimensions of the titular adjective, which not only refers to economic interest, but also to a moral dimension. "Equiano undertakes to be 'interesting' in the larger 'interest' of humanity, to assert a subjective claim in the service of objective ends" (2004: 442). In contrast to Crusoe's individualised "strange and surprising adventures", Equiano demands the right to be acknowledged as a writing subject on behalf of other Africans. At the same time, his claim is also a more fundamental challenge to the social status quo in the transatlantic world. Against Defoe's insular masculinity, with which his narrative shares several parallels, such as the simultaneous prospective and retrospective temporal orientation as I will show, Equiano could be read as laying the foundation for an oceanic version of Britishness. Hence his narrative is situated more overtly in the realm of the political discourse of the time with his subscription list including many dignitaries used as moral support for the abolitionist cause. In 1792, the first attempt to pass an abolition bill in parliament fails because of the protest by the British planter lobby. Equiano dies in 1797 after he had retired to some wealth resulting from his writing in 1794 even before the slave trade was eventually abolished in Britain in 1807.

In Equiano's writing the paradoxical convergence of slavery and modernity that I outlined in the introduction becomes tangible. The *Interesting Narrative* displays strategies of "becoming modern", which Gates describes as a "movement from slave-object to author-subject" (1988: 157), mostly through the reference to shared Christianity but also in an appeal to feeling. However, Aravamudan contests a false equation of literacy solely with "the 'West'" (1999: 272) and emphasises that "the colonized subject" is both an "object of representation and agent of resistance" (1999: 4). Equiano's writing then should not be truncated as imitative of a Crusoe figure or a "mimic" Englishman. As I argue throughout this study, understanding literary texts from the centre and the margins as entangled shows a much more complex reciprocity between feelings of

familiarity in constructing Britishness inside and outside of Britain. Equiano can claim Britishness because it is at this historical juncture that Britishness for the first time becomes imaginable as inclusive of subjects who are not yet citizens. Ever since the 1772 Somerset case, while slavery was not yet abolished in the colonies, it was marked as incompatible with English law and hence turned England to a preferred destination of Black subjects and a common reference point in their writing. But while chattel slavery was still in place, this claim of narrative authority remained paradoxical. Analysing the trope of personification in sentimental slave narratives, Festa contends that this mode of representation tries “to make a man through a literary form that is written by a person legally constituted as a thing” (2006: 134). Following Festa, such redundant personification dehumanises those it supposedly confers subjectivity to because their status as human is never taken for granted. However, in contrast, for example, to the mentioned sentimentalised image of the kneeling slave on the Wedgwood medallion, Equiano’s text provides many moments of agency and a much more foundational tonality of modernity than that of sentimentality alone. As in all eight authors discussed in this study, it is a specific national construction of British enlightenment, rather than a more global humanism, that is evoked in claims for inclusion which makes Equiano’s imaginative belonging to Britain a successful literary project in the (transatlantic) public sphere. Despite the initial readings of his narrative as part of the African American tradition, it is no coincidence that his autobiography was not very successful with contemporary audiences in the United States (cf. Caldwell 1999: 280; Doherty 1997: 580).<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, in my analysis I do not simply want to “claim” Equiano for a specific national literary canon. Obviously, he is a subject that has crossed many waters and national borders. Consequently, in the past twenty years, Equiano has been linked to a plethora of critical concepts in the vocabulary of postcolonial and critical race theory, such as the trickster (cf. Bozeman 2003: 61; Doyle 2008: 198) and hybridity (Bozeman 2003: 61); he has been called a mimic man (Plasa 2000), referring to Homi Bhabha’s famous dictum that mimicry of hegemonic norms by the colonised is simultaneously resemblance and menace (Bhabha 1994: 123), as well as a creole (cf. Thomas 2000: 227–228). Without granting predominance of one label over the other in the following, I want to probe how we can describe Equiano’s ambivalent adoption and critique of Britishness focusing more on the tonality of his tale than on his positionality, hence highlighting the hybridity of his prose (rather than his identity) in the

Bakhtinian sense of combining different genres or mixing different languages (cf. Bakhtin 1994: 287, 358–359). Linking him to the discussion of the foundational introspection of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, I understand his narrative as promoting an oceanic Britishness in contrast to the more “insular” version of Englishness that Defoe's novel seems to adhere to. Already in 1987 Hortense Spillers speaks of the “oceanic” state of unbelonging that the enslaved experienced. She writes:

Those African persons in “Middle Passage” were literally suspended in the “oceanic,” if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity: removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet “American” either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere* at all. (1987: 72)

In contrast to a Freudian psychoanalytical understanding of “oceanic” as undifferentiated identity, I want to argue that in Equiano's writing there is also a specific “wider” or oceanic imagination of what could be considered British. That is, on the one hand, a chance to claim familiarity/subjectivity of the formerly enslaved, and, on the other hand, it already points in the direction of the new global imperialism that is built on geographical expansion rather than enslaved labour. Incorporating subjects like Equiano (and later Seacole) as part of this project of global Britishness bolsters colonial expansion and the conception of a supposedly humane, gentlemanly, and “fair” British imperialism during the nineteenth century. But preceding these developments into which Seacole is embroiled, Equiano uses eighteenth-century literary strategies, including but not limited to sentimental pathos, to provide exactly what Defoe's text could not deliver, a form of focalization that communicates insights from the inside and the outside. Hence oceanic Britishness does not only refer to his position as an African in Europe; like the insularity of Defoe's literary discourse, it points to the literary diversity of his prose. In contrast to what Richetti calls Defoe's “dialogue with himself”, but also using Bakhtin's terminology, Gates has prominently argued that the “black tradition is double-voiced” (1988: xxv, 110). In such an understanding, Equiano is foundational of a modern form of narrative text, not only because he is self-reflexive; his account is modern, because it is sceptical of a univocal cultural identity and can encompass a whole range of literary registers. This multiplicity then is characteristic of his writing that indeed is more than simply

imitative. What is more, in comparison to other early Black writing, his narrative is a much more detailed account of the events of his life and individual episodes, whether they be factual or indeed fictional. He also demonstrates a retrospective awareness of how his personality developed. This renders him akin to realist fiction writers, as Ogude believes: “In Equiano, credibility becomes an aspect of character rather than of the tale” (1982: 36). Believing in his life story implies revelling in the accomplishments of a Black self-made man.

Beginning with conventionalised repudiations of personal vanity and an acknowledgement of “the mercies of Providence” (IN 31), Equiano opens his narrative with descriptions of African customs in his supposed homeland of the Eboe province in the kingdom of Benin on the Guinea Coast, located in what is present-day Nigeria. Given Equiano’s young age at the time of his supposed enslavement, these initial episodes are nowadays largely believed to be drawn from texts like William Snelgrave’s (1734) *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave Trade*, Anthony Benezet’s (1771) *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (which Equiano references explicitly in his notes) as well as from oral accounts of other slaves (cf. Boulukos 2007; Bozeman 2003; Carretta 2005: 234; Ogude 1982).<sup>33</sup> Trying to describe African customs in familiar terms, he “makes explicit the oddity of what is familiarly ‘European’ as seen from the point of view he draws beyond the geography and customs of Europe” (Barrett 2014: 53). He, for example, compares African cultural practices like circumcision favourably to those of the ancient Jews (cf. IN 41). While the rites and rituals of Africans might seem alien to Europeans, Equiano, using the first-person plural pronoun “we” in this section, emphasises that “his people” rely on old traditions that are potentially compatible with those of his readers. Wheeler posits, this “comparison attempts to use Jews as a bridge between Africans and Europeans” (2000: 262). Additionally, Equiano highlights cleanliness and faithfulness and explains that slavery in Africa is often a penalty for adultery (cf. IN 33). Thus, he contrasts African forms of enslavement, belonging to the realm of morally justified punishment (after all, his father, a respected chief or elder in his community, also owned slaves), with the unacceptable European economic exploitation of Africans. This chapter, relying, as mentioned, largely on borrowed accounts shows an affinity between Equiano’s narrative and travel writing and ethnography that uses realist descriptions to humanise Africans.

Equiano’s kidnapping, detailed in the second chapter, is then a significant shift in perspective. Told from the point of view of the young

character-focalizer, it provides an immediacy that is more characteristic of adventure writing à la Defoe. Passing several stations, Equiano encounters those “depraved” Africans that sell their countrymen to the Europeans.

I came at length to a country, the inhabitants of which differed from us in all those particulars. I was very much struck with this difference, especially when I came among a people who did not circumcise, and eat without washing their hands. They cooked also in iron pots, and had European cutlasses and cross bows, which were unknown to us, and fought with their fists amongst themselves. Their women were not so modest as ours, for they eat, and drank, and slept with their men. (IN 53–54)

Strikingly, it is as if these people, located closer to the ocean, have been infected by “Europeanness”; the lack of hygiene (no washing of hands, no circumcision), and their European cooking habits, seem intimately linked to a propensity for violence and sexual immodesty in “their women”.

The young Equiano finally sees the sea for the first time, but the open water is immediately linked to the sight of the slave-ship, which filled him “with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror” (IN 55). In contrast to Crusoe’s youthful and defiant boarding of his first ship that signals independence, Equiano’s first journey is the traumatic loss of autonomy. While Crusoe leaves his family to gain freedom, Equiano’s severing of family ties amounts to the forfeiture of sovereignty. Gilroy famously identifies the ship as a novel chronotope “to rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora into the Western hemisphere” (1993: 17). In this endeavour, he emphasises the need to focus on “routes” instead of on the more prominent homonym “roots” in describing African modernity as the “journey from slave ship to citizenship” (1993: 31). It is movement rather than fixed “blood” relation to the soil that becomes characteristic of this diasporic framing of modernity that follows the traumatic loss of lineage. The ship as a chronotope, emblematic of the interrelation of space-time according to Bakhtin (1994: 84), for Equiano thus signifies both the loss and eventual reclaiming of identity. Accordingly, William Boelhower argues that the ship is the point of connection between enslavement and eventual freedom, “the ship stands for the principle of reversibility itself” (2004: 30). This reversibility is the logical starting point of a narrative that reflects the eventual subject status of the narrating I. As in most autodiegetic narratives, the split between experiencing character-focalizer and retrospective narrator-focalizer is

linked to age,<sup>34</sup> as was also apparent in *Robinson Crusoe*. But in Equiano's case this also includes his newly acquired freedom which is the precondition for him to tell his story in the first place: "[b]alancing two simultaneous perspectives throughout, the freedman Equiano has become portrays the slave he once was" (Lowe 2009: 104). In relation to the imagery of the ship on water, it is of significance that the freeman Equiano eventually assumes the title of captain. While he mentions several times that he cannot swim (cf. e.g. IN 120), he finally learns to steer a boat himself (IN 144). The once deadly threat of the water can be overcome in commanding the vessel that stands in relation to his regained autonomy.<sup>35</sup>

Similar to *Robinson Crusoe* then, defiance of initial adversities and a growing self-consciousness of his moral weaknesses make the narration of his development particularly novelistic in tone. But as mentioned, there are also significant differences between the freeman Crusoe and the ex-slave Equiano. The coloniser Crusoe leaves one island to settle on another, and while his adventurous tale also relies heavily on ships and travelling, these ships are almost always connected to the hazards of storm and shipwreck. While both men must accept God as their heavenly master, Crusoe claims the land of the island literally as his property. In contrast, Equiano's fate remains tied to the slippery sphere of the waters. For him, possession first and foremost means possession of his own person.

As in Cugoano's writing before and in Wedderburn's after him, slavery is intimately tied to the term "horror" which appears multiple times in his report of his abduction (cf. IN 50, 53, 55, 58). The actual description then of the inside of the slave ship during the middle passage becomes *the* literary topos par excellence to convey this horror and generate sympathy in the readership. Thus, Equiano's text to a certain degree adheres to conventionalised sentimental tropes that are also characteristic of (white) abolitionist writing. But in contrast to popular abolitionist poems such as "The Dying Negro" (1775 [1773]) by John Bicknell and Thomas Days, he can claim the authenticating perspective of first-hand experience narrated in longer prose which makes his account stand out. Equiano's autobiography is characterised then by several modes of doubling, the mentioned temporal split between younger and older self that is typical of autodiegetic narratives in general, the added element of the liberated subject contemplating his earlier status as chattel, and, finally, the perspective that Du Bois later famously described as "double-consciousness", "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (2008

[1903]: 8). Thus, the division between the different narrating Is is enhanced by the fact that Equiano is aware of a judging white audience, the implied narratees of his account. These various splits then inform the tone of Equiano's text that, on the one hand, adheres to foundational principles of narrating modern subjectivity and, on the other hand, delves into a plethora of different genres, ranging from the mentioned religious and adventure formulas to eighteenth-century sentimentalism.<sup>36</sup>

When the young Equiano is forced to enter the slave ship, he is overcome with terror and faints (IN 55). While swooning and fainting are ubiquitous in sentimentalist texts like Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (2009 [1771]), Equiano does more than trying to evoke the tearful pity of his (white) readership. In his first impressions he also offers quite realistic detailed descriptions of the sensory and olfactory disorientation as well as the objects, such as tubs and chains, that surround him, and which are used to aggrieve the captives. This is characteristic of the hybrid tone of his prose, wavering between modern self-making and sentimental affection.

The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. [...] In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death, which I began to hope would soon put an end to my miseries. (IN 58)

Immediately, the ship is constructed as a site that removes him and the other Africans on board from the realm of the human. Each individual human morphs into the mass that is the slave cargo, visualised so forcefully in the depiction of the bodies crammed into the Liverpool slave ship *Brookes*. In the bird's eye view of the image, widely used by abolitionists to evoke sympathy, the black figures become legible only as small black blots separated by the tiniest bit of white blank space which, Festa argues, "does

not attribute feeling or thought to the figure of the slave; it unveils the brutal treatment of persons as chattel by obliging the reader to enter fully into the barbaric logic of the trade" (2006: 183).<sup>37</sup> This lacking autonomy in Equiano's account is translated as the resort to suicide, which Gilroy describes as the most radical form of agency that a slave had access to. Some of the men jump overboard trying to kill themselves and one of them is retrieved and severely punished for "attempting to prefer death to slavery" (IN 59).<sup>38</sup> This almost absurd formulation highlights the status of slavery as a form of "social death", which, as Orlando Patterson has famously outlined already in 1982, does not kill the body of the enslaved that is exploited as workforce, but severs the communal ties as a form of "natal alienation" to conditions that provide the bare minimum for survival (cf. 1982: 5–10, 38). Real death appears the preferable alternative in this light, although an alternative that one can only "attempt to prefer". The young Equiano himself hopes for death in this "wretched situation".

In order to escape this bleak fate, Equiano adopts two strategies that paradoxically include the disavowal of European depravity and the adoption of enlightenment ideals. He fends off dehumanisation by turning the tables and emphasises that the slaveholders themselves are inhumane and given their treatment of men, women, and children cannot be called Christians. If the Europeans would truly adopt the ideals that they promoted, they could no longer support the unjust system of slavery. He rejects the assumption that Africans are less than human, and, at the same time, he is willing to concede to the "apparent inferiority of an African". Equiano thus tries to establish "likeness" with his readers despite superficial differences that are conceived as a temporal lag. If African customs can be compared to (ancient) Jewishness, their complexion can also be linked to the "dark" Spaniards.

Surely the minds of the Spaniards did not change with their complexions! Are there not causes enough to which the apparent inferiority of an African may be ascribed, without limiting the goodness of God [...]. Might it not naturally be ascribed to their situation? When they come among Europeans, they are ignorant of their language, religion, manners, and customs. Are any pains taken to teach them these? Are they treated as men? Does not slavery itself depress the mind, and extinguish all its fire, and every noble sentiment? But, above all, what advantages do not a refined people possess over those who are rude and uncultivated? Let the polished and haughty European recollect that *his* ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilized, and even



barbarous. Did Nature make *them* inferior to their sons? and should *they too* have been made slaves? Every rational mind answers, No. Let such reflections as these melt the pride of their superiority into sympathy for the wants and miseries of their sable brethren, and compel them to acknowledge, that understanding is not confined to feature or colour. (IN 45)

Equiano here is repeating established sentimental tropes of abolition, appealing to the ability to learn and he proves an “African capacity” to adopt those enlightenment ideals that he recognises as beneficial in hindsight. He de-essentialises the situations of Africans and via reference to sympathy, in the enlightenment philosophy of fellow-feeling, asks Europeans to imagine themselves in the slave’s position. It is the condition of slavery that “depress[es] the mind, and extinguish[es] all its fire, and every noble sentiment”, not the lacking natural capability of Africans or their darker skin. With more intimacy to European ideals of education, they too could aspire to similarity, clearly alluding to the “man and brother” ideal of fraternity without challenging the current “civilisational superiority”.

Accordingly, the young Equiano shows a great interest in learning and self-improvement. Like Crusoe, he is absorbed in all things to do with navigation. His first “surprise” are the flying fish and later he mentions the quadrant that instils his “surprise”, “curiosity”, and “wonder” (IN 59), and while magic seems the first explanation for young “uncultured” Equiano, it also marks him as a rational observer who will learn about the science of seafaring eventually. One more likeness to Defoe is the noted combination of empirical description and constant apprehensions that Equiano attributes to his initial fear of white people, comparable to Crusoe’s premonitions regarding the cannibals. This form of reversal has been noted also in relation to Equiano’s framing of slavery as a form of white cannibalism (cf. IN 55, 60, 65).<sup>39</sup> Hence, after his initial reservations about white culture, Equiano is fascinated with reading, with religion, and with all things that he now perceives as advantageous. Travelling during the Seven Years’ War becomes a way to engage with new things, people, and cultures and learn more about naval matters (cf. IN 70). It is the homosocial bonding with the other sailors and Richard “Dick” Baker particularly during this military episode of his life that facilitates his identification with the Western lifestyle. In this narrative framing, Equiano can criticise white depravity, but he never entirely dismisses what elements of modernity he (and possibly his readers) aspire to. True Christians would

not enslave other people, progressive capitalists would invest in Africa rather than drain it of its workforce.

Despite the various described ruptures in terms of temporal orientation of the text, Equiano is the single focalizer who offers multiple routes of identification, emphasising different aspects of his identity. The presumably white Others, who read the text, need to engage with Equiano. Hazel Carby calls this a strategy of “mutual non-recognition” (2009: 632). Accordingly, she reads Equiano’s text almost as a utopian, postcolonial identity before the fact:

Equiano speaks as a composite subject, a subject inhabiting multiple differences, as African, as black, as British, as Christian, as a diasporic and transnational citizen of the world, and in the process offers his readers the possibility of imagining a more complex cultural and national identity for themselves. (Carby 2009: 634–635)

In contrast to Carby, I would be slightly less optimistic in the readers’ capacity to empathise with Equiano’s multiplicity. The narrative follows a specific pattern of spiritual development, with his baptism to become a member of the Church of England in 1759 and his spiritual awakening and conversion to Methodism in 1774 (cf. Carretta 2010: 81) that is initiated by his “heart-felt relief in reading my bible at home” (IN 178) rather than in church. The retrospective orientation of the text always assures the reader that Equiano is now more like than different from them. So, unlike Carby I would not read this as a dismissal of national identity in favour of a utopian cosmopolitanism, but rather as a sign of an imagination of Britishness as inclusive. The Britishness of Equiano’s readership is not challenged but can incorporate Otherness in ways that profit its self-understanding rather than unsettle it. This form of inclusivity time and again becomes the marker of a national exceptionalism when compared to other European colonial powers and the United States. But it also seems to offer subjects like Equiano a narrative space to claim a distinct Black British identity—often in disavowal of an (US-)American identity that still seems too strongly engrained in the horrors of chattel slavery.<sup>40</sup>

In England, he starts to feel more like a paid servant than a slave:

It was now between three and four years since I first came to England, a great part of which I had spent at sea; so that I became inured to that service, and began to consider myself as happily situated; for my master treated

me always extremely well; and my attachment and gratitude to him were very great. From the various scenes I had beheld on ship-board, I soon grew a stranger to terror of every kind, and was, in that respect at least, almost an Englishman. (IN 77)

Equiano constructs a vicinity to *modern* Englishness (he is almost an Englishman) which distances him from the Atlantic horrors of slavery that did not grant him agency.<sup>41</sup> He masters the language “tolerably well” and is no longer afraid of Europeans, he even calls the English “new countrymen”, a title formerly reserved for Africans (IN 77). However, what follows is his famous declaration of aspiring to their superior status, “to resemble them”, to “imitate their manners” (IN 78). Therefore, rather than link him to the later American slave narrative as many critics in the wake of Gates’s reading have done, Tanya Caldwell emphasises Equiano’s distinct affective relation to Britishness, which she reads as a sign of assimilation (1999: 280).<sup>42</sup> However, instead of trying to establish whether Equiano’s attachment to Britishness should be read simply as political conservatism, I want to relate this affective orientation of the text to the retrospective temporality in the narrative framework that Gates has highlighted. Thereby I follow the more recent “postcolonial” debate on Equiano that emphasises the paradoxes and ambivalences in Equiano’s attachment to England that cannot be reduced to assimilation.

In his well-known discussion of the trope of the talking book, Gates (1988: 127–169) stresses the “difference between the narrator and this character of his (past) self, a difference marked through verb tense as the difference between object and subject” (1988: 157). But instead of reading this as a progression in the mastery of Western letters, to become an “Anglo-African” as Gates contends, I would accentuate the many contradictions that shape Equiano’s narrative. Rather than assimilate to an idea of univocal subjectivity and the romance with the autonomous subject, Equiano’s modernity is in many ways more “realistic”. It highlights a conflicted attachment to identity based on nationality that can never be entirely successful but is still linked to the promise of inclusion. Formally, like any modern Bildungsroman, his narrative seems to trace different stages of development. However, the temporality seems somewhat odd at times. It often feels as if, similar to *Tristram Shandy*’s non-linear narration, Equiano is getting ahead of himself, which is an attribute of the “writing slave”. The author Equiano describes how reading and writing is his greatest desire, which we know, in reading his account, he mastered

exceptionally well. Equiano's narrative aspiration is already fulfilled in the titular "written by himself". His narrative is based both on a retrospective account of *Bildung*, but also from the very beginning the prospective promise of freedom. What is more, there seems to be a specific conception of space-time related to this progression. Like many colonial subjects, Equiano becomes British extraterritorially, he travels more than he stays on the island. This can also be connected to his paradoxical adoption of capitalism which he embraces while he is legally still considered chattel, again a significant split between narrating and experiencing I.

On his journey towards becoming British, commerce and the Christian belief in providence are the generic prerequisites to become a self-made man or "his own man", and here is another often-noted parallel to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and the concept of the *homo economicus*.<sup>43</sup> But again, rather than read this simply as imitation or aspiring to the hegemonic ideal, Equiano's text, penned by the once unfree subject, also uncovers the paradoxes that are foundational of modernity's romance with freedom. On the one hand, Equiano accurately notes his monetary transactions (e.g. IN 166; cf. Sandiford 1988: 133) and recounts the history of inner-African slavery (IN 38–39). On the other hand, he is not much invested in becoming the proprietor of things but more fundamentally strives to become the owner of himself, a premise that for Equiano is the goal rather than the starting point of his picaresque adventures and thus disrupts the linearity of capitalism's romance with surplus value. The appeal of modernity's connection to capitalism for the ex-slave then is not so much accumulation, but the promise of manumission. Initially, as Aravamudan writes, "The commercial ideology of Equiano's African ventures resemble the earlier from that we have already encountered, that of Defoe's progressive Protestant mercantilism" (1999: 237) and Anderson claims that within the conventions of economic order he can even be read as "a mean sea-farer in pursuit of gain" (2004: 240).<sup>44</sup> However, in contrast to the magical accumulation of Crusoe's wealth in his absence, Equiano is cheated of his rightful earnings repeatedly and white men continuously try to steal from him (cf. e.g. IN 162, 170). Hence, the idea of the *homo economicus* is a much more contested and precarious ideal for Equiano. Gesa Mackenthun convincingly links this uncertainty to a more realistic literary style. While Defoe's narrative of wish-fulfilment still echoes the romance, Mackenthun calls Equiano a "real-life witness of the life at the other end of Robinson Crusoe's world of magical accumulation and possessive individualism" (2004: 28).<sup>45</sup> Because Equiano is the acting subject and the

object of sentimentality, he also disrupts the narrative logic of sentimentality.<sup>46</sup> In this way, Equiano's narrative wavers between sentimental pathos and realistic depiction of an identity position that is not hegemonic. It is this reliance on intersubjectivity that also indicates violent disavowal which is, in fact, the marker of true modernity. This is a characteristic which Defoe's account still lacks.

Through the unlikely adoption of the model of the imperial white mercantilist man, Equiano can eventually buy his own freedom, which once more points to the paradoxical temporality of manumission in the genre of the autobiography. In a matter of one day, his situation is reversed. Nonetheless, in this form of life writing, we know the narrator-focalizer to be free even before the character-focalizer can describe his legal freedom: "I who had been a slave in the morning, trembling at the will of another, now became my own master, and compleatly [sic] free" (IN 137). Festa associates this form of narration with paradoxical redundancy:

to buy himself back, Equiano must be a subject already, but only manumission can make him into the subject able to execute the contract he has already performed in order to become that subject. The paradox of the manumission certificate—that one must be a man or woman to become one—is also the paradox of the autobiographical text, which calls into being the writing subject who must exist for there to be a text. (2006: 143)

Equiano's biggest gain then is not strictly monetary, but (cultural and actual) mobility as a sailor and a writer. The mentioned strategic adoption of a British identity then can also be linked to an economic world view of investing in a profitable and original idea of self rather than imitation. If slavery is connected to "social death", entering the English public sphere can be regarded as a form of reparation. In the economic language of capitalising on profits, Britain seems like the more susceptible literary audience, with his narrative, as mentioned, becoming literally much more successful on the British than the American market.

This literary accomplishment then, I argue, is connected to a display of familial feeling that, on the one hand, adheres to British sensibilities, and, on the other hand, can profit from the conception of a new form of oceanic Britishness that is imagined as inclusive of Otherness. The beginning abolitionist discourse provides a willing audience for Equiano. But this is only within the parameters of a more hesitant ameliorationist rather than straightforward abolitionist logic. Even worse than slavery in the United

States, it is the West Indies that are described as the quintessential counterpart to freedom that continues to pose a threat even for “free negroes”. One of the reasons for the focus on this particular location of slavery seems to be connected to the ongoing British investment in the slave trade in the West Indies rather than the “lost colony” of the United States at the time. Unlike Seacole’s and Dickens’s later straightforward disdain for the lacking civility of the “Yankees”, Equiano holds the West Indian planters in contempt for their moral colonial lag. Rather than contrast a US-American jingoism with British imperial civility, as Seacole and Dickens do in the mid-nineteenth century, Equiano still projects hope in a reformation of the colonies to mirror the enlightened ideals of the “mother country”.

These things opened my mind to a new scene of horror, to which I had been before a stranger. Hitherto I had thought only slavery dreadful; but the state of a free negro appeared to me now equally so at least, and in some respects even worse, for they live in constant alarm for their liberty, which is but nominal, for they are universally insulted and plundered without the possibility of redress; for such is the equity of the West Indian laws, that no free negro’s evidence will be admitted in their courts of justice. In this situation, is it surprising that slaves, when mildly treated, should prefer even the misery of slavery to such a mockery of freedom? I was now completely disgusted with the West Indies, and thought I never should be entirely free until I had left them. (IN 122)

The West Indian “mockery of freedom” underlines the spatial dimension of slavery. Rather than read Equiano’s journey as a linear progression from slavery to freedom in spatio-temporal terms, it is more a traversing of different geographies of un/freedom, which includes a travelling back and forth between his first sojourn in England, followed by a prolonged period of his life spent travelling all over the world and his final return. Set in a time even before the abolitionists could hope to outlaw the slave trade, Equiano’s critique for the most part is directed at the inhumane slave *trade* rather than condemn all forms of enslavement straightforwardly. And it is specifically the geography of the West Indies that does not live up to the ideal of British freedom.

Equiano is happy to eventually leave “the American quarter of the globe” (IN 159) for “Old England”, as is his preferred name for his adopted home (cf. IN 138, 161). The “New World” is corrupted and it is almost as if he must travel back to a supposedly purer state which queers

the idea of temporal/civilisational progress to a certain degree. Nevertheless, Equiano's supposed assimilation into Britishness is also met with obstacles. He continuously claims British civility to overcome supposed signifiers of division, the "impasse created by complexion when it functions as a sign of national identity and communal feeling" (Wheeler 2000: 269). There are episodes when, in the alleged naivety of the young character-focalizer, he tries to wash his Blackness off (cf. IN 69) or wears "white face" (cf. IN 180) when he unsuccessfully tries to help another Black man, John Annis, from being kidnapped into West Indian slavery (cf. Wheeler 2000: 274). Equiano becomes an advocate for the early Black community and more than any other of the early Black Atlantic writers associates with Black and white communities.

In this context, another often-noted element in claiming identity is the question of his proper name. In contrast to Poll the parrot who can only repeat what he has been taught and the externally focalized Friday whose identity is entirely bound to his "master's" act of naming, Equiano consciously reflects on the process of appellation. Throughout his story, Equiano changes names repeatedly, from his original name Olaudah Equiano, meaning "fortunate" or "favoured" (IN 41) that he takes up again in the publication of his narrative as his pen name, to Michael on the African ship, to Jacob in Virginia, which he initially favours over Gustavus Vassa (cf. IN 63–64), the grandiose title after the Swedish patriot king that Pascal gives him on his journey to England but which he at first refuses. Lindon Barret, in his posthumously published *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Modernity*, speaks of a "disruptive binomialism" that is preserved in the title's "Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa", which, according to Barrett, "redacts the formative violence of the modern that the narrative recasts, subsequently and progressively" (2014: 49). Not settling for one name, Equiano, the narrated I, is as much present as Vassa, the narrating I (cf. Barrett 2014: 55). Moreover, Frank Kelleter argues that the "precarious status of authorial self-attribution is furthermore emphasized by Equiano's decision to append the term the African (probably meant to connote noble birth) to his European name: it is 'Gustavus Vassa, the African,' not 'Olaudah Equiano, the African'" (2004: 72). Time and again, Equiano's status is one that cannot be pinned down to one location, one name, or one identity. However, rather than read this solely as the dilemma of the extraordinary or hybrid subject, we could also interpret this as the foundational condition of modernity's self-reflexivity.

Understood in this way, it is again Equiano rather than Crusoe who is the epitome of realistic modernity.

Emotionally Equiano is drawn to the promise of inclusivity and repelled by the realities of inequality that are often embodied in relationships that are framed in familial terms. Because he feels increasingly like the white men he associates with, their betrayal is hard to fathom. Carretta, for instance, characterises Pascal, who had broken his promise to set Equiano free, as a “foster-father” and speaks of the “familial relationship he had with his fellow shipmates” (2010: 84). The ship once more stands for the loss of familial bonds, not only of his African family of origin, but also of his adoptive community of seafarers. Caldwell compares Equiano’s longing for father figures in his masters to Crusoe’s guilt towards his father (cf. 1999: 272). But while Crusoe can remake himself as the magical beloved and omnipotent father of Friday and his subjects on his island, Equiano is constantly struggling with the real-life tenuousness of emotional bonds that involve violence, loss, and failed intersubjective recognition.

Significantly, Equiano also recounts episodes of Black familiarity. When he talks about missing his sister, one person takes him to a young Black woman they assume must be his sister given the physical similarity. “Improbable as this story was”, Equiano chooses to take the chance rather than dismiss the stereotypical conflation of “all Black people look alike”; Equiano himself “at first sight, [...] really thought it was she” (IN 79–80). Later, on the Isle of Wight, he is smitten by “a black boy about my own size” who “caught hold of me in his arms as if I had been his brother, though we had never seen each other before” (IN 85). These incidents are interspersed into the episodic adventures of the picaro Equiano, who as quickly as he comes across these substitutional family members, like Crusoe, leaves again: “I longed to engage in new adventures, and to see fresh wonders” (IN 85). However, there is a distinct difference here in the tonality. Equiano not only expresses heart-felt familial feeling, he also manages to insert casually the presence of Africans in eighteenth-century Europe who bond with each other in forms that are not necessarily part of the abolitionist spectacle of Black suffering. These encounters are incidental, but I believe crucial in the formation of an identity that, in a possibly isolating situation, always seeks interpersonal contact. Equiano’s tenderness and affection are linked to a construction of a form of masculinity that is both assertive and non-threatening.

Accordingly, Felicity Nussbaum describes Equiano as “a public hero, an independent spirit and adventurer, who possesses a reassuringly secure



masculinity, in its lack of brutal aggressiveness and apparent asexuality, does not arouse white male anxieties or feminine libido” (Nussbaum 2001: 62). She further stresses the importance of Black masculinity in the discourses on human rights that early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1992 [1792]) also demand for women for the first time. The radical early 1790s, preceding the fears and political backlash sparked by the French and Haitian Revolutions, conceptually opened the possibility of an inclusive understanding of citizenship that could potentially extend to the formerly enslaved and women and which Equiano’s 1789 publication already envisions. Nussbaum asserts,

Equiano generically employs the masculine gender in a manner typical of the later eighteenth century references to the rights of man, to the rights of free-men, and to his countrymen. The plight of black women would seem to be subsumed within those of black men within those political arguments. (2001: 56)

As a route towards inclusion in a community of citizens, Equiano’s sexuality needs to be downplayed textually (and Black women’s position marginalised). His *Narrative* is characterised by omissions and the problematic relation to white femininity. While he lovingly talks about his African family of origin in the beginning, especially his mother and his sister, his white English wife, Susanna Cullen, is mentioned in one sentence only (cf. IN 235).<sup>47</sup> Thus, it is not the need for adventure, but rather for modesty in order not to offend religious and moral sensibilities of the British public that motivates the absence of his wife from the text, which at first glance might appear similar to Crusoe’s omission of his family.

In the temporality of the narrative the past as a slave who has lost his African family is much more prominent than the present in which he starts a new English interracial family. Nussbaum links the prominence of the lost African family to the register of sentimentalism, whereby the Black woman “increasingly comes to represent the sentimental locus of what is irretrievably lost to the slave—freedom, love, family, and his native country” (2003: 192). While this is undoubtedly true, I believe it is equally relevant that Equiano at times is quite explicit in his condemnation of white sexualised violence directed at Black women in terms that cannot be reduced to the sentimental spectacle of Black suffering alone. In the sentimental logic of the family, slavery is of course the ultimate perversion of familial feeling. However, by offering descriptions and criticism of

European “savagery”, the African “resituates the European observer as the observed” (Innes 2002: 41) and here again locality is important: While in relation to his British family, Equiano does not have to talk about sexuality, Britain’s colonies are considered sites of sexual and moral misconduct—a representation that specifically affects mixed-race and Black women of Caribbean descent like Seacole who are readily seen as embodying a licentiousness that will lead white men astray. As a counterweight to such assumptions, Equiano recounts how Black men in St Kitts chose wives far away from their households so that they could not be punished by being forced to flog their own spouses (cf. IN 107). This form of dialogicity criticises white depravity and normalises Black familial feeling that is not spectacularised and linked to one extraordinary “noble savage” as in Behn’s earlier *Oroonoko*.

Hence, despite the obvious delicacy in depicting a Black man’s sexuality and in contrast to *Robinson Crusoe*, the interrelated discourses of race and sexuality are still quite central in Equiano’s text. Equiano repeatedly highlights the double standards of white society—and here indeed the sympathies of the reader are directed to the plight of Others. This affects Black men especially who were either infantilised in the image of the non-threatening ornamental Black boy/page (cf. Nussbaum 2001: 57) or considered potential sexual aggressors. Equiano criticises that every Black man who looks at a white woman is treated as a rapist while at the same time the crass abuse of enslaved women by their white owners is tolerated (cf. IN 109, cf. Nussbaum 2003: 211). In this context, he provides the example of a “negro-man” who is “staked to the ground” “because he had been connected with a white woman who was a common prostitute” as opposed to the sailors who “gratify their brutal passion with females not ten years old” (IN 104). Equiano continues by offering various versions of the chiasmus of white depravity and Black nobility that is enhanced by the degrading of the “common prostitute”. In contrast, by claiming the “virtue” of “an innocent African girl” who is brutalised by the white slavers and defending the wrongly accused Black man when “the temptation was offered by one of a different colour, though the most abandoned woman of her species” (IN 104) Equiano engages in a complex playing off of race, gender, class, and notions of sexual propriety.

Defoe sublimates Crusoe’s sexuality into economy and Friday seems happily asexual. In contrast, Equiano not only mentions the sexual violence that Black women experience at the hands of white men, he simultaneously tries to delineate an original African modesty that repudiates

assumption of “wild animalistic” insatiable sexuality that Black women and men have been attributed with and normalises a mundane desire for familial feeling.<sup>48</sup> As a narrative of episodic testimonial to instances of white brutality, his account is both sentimental *and* realistic. Much like Crusoe, it does not really matter that we now know many of these examples are in fact taken from earlier abolitionist accounts. The fact that in the narrative he, a Black man, can attest to them, gives them a new form of moral credibility.

To recapitulate, sexual interracial relations obviously remain a sensitive topic in Equiano’s account: we can notice a strategic downplaying of the marriage of Equiano to a white woman (which unlike in the United States was never illegal in Britain) but still an acknowledgement of interracial rape. The notion that the supposedly separate races “mix” is, of course, at the heart of many racist fears and could undermine the binary of Black and white altogether. Equiano also acknowledges the growing population of mixed-race children fathered by Europeans. Foreshadowing the demands to be accepted into the realm of the familiar that Robert Wedderburn later voices explicitly, Equiano asks, “Pray, reader, are these sons and daughters of the French planter less his children by being begotten on black women!” (IN 109). He also recounts how a white man and a free Black woman can only legally be married on the waters rather than in the church. The ocean here quite literally is constructed as a place of possibility for the “loving pair” (IN 119).<sup>49</sup>

The metaphorical sphere of familial belonging and the actual make-up of “multicultural societies” remain conflictively intertwined, as becomes even more apparent in the recalcitrant mixed-race offspring’s demands of inclusion into the national family, as does Robert Wedderburn in his later pamphlet and Mary Seacole in her more nationalist assumption of the role of the heroic “mother of the nation”. In his earlier narrative, Equiano wavers between evoking a less threatening version of Christian commonality as depicted on the Wedgwood medallion, and more radical accusations against white depravity. As Rai puts it, “What one must affirm [...] is the complicity between Equiano’s deployment of abolitionist sympathy as resistant humanism and sympathy as good colonial policy. The one is not the exclusion of the other” (Rai 2002: 85).<sup>50</sup> Consequently, it is important to note that at the time such backing of colonial expansion and simultaneous advocacy for abolition was not uncommon at all.<sup>51</sup>

In scholars’ contemporary (postcolonial) efforts to make sense of these ambivalences the unease seems to lie exactly with what comes across as

Equiano's simultaneous assimilation and resistance. Some, like Aravamudan, emphasise that he "writes himself centrally into the narrative of British nationalism" (1999: 238), while others, like Kelleter, highlight "the text's strategic correlation of Western universalism with a consciousness of cultural difference" (2004: 80). I have argued that Equiano's attempts of making himself familiar fundamentally resist a binary conception of cultural identities as well as a narrow version of political agency. In that respect, his writing is not only foundational of a claim to Black subjectivity, but of subjectivity that can be both oceanic and British in a form of "dialectical intertextuality with English-language narrative conventions" as Doyle (2008: 197) describes it. Crusoe crosses the Atlantic but remains steadfastly English in all his travels, Equiano, it seems, claims a Britishness that is shaped by his maritime connections. However, while this is often framed in a language of political progressiveness versus conservatism,<sup>52</sup> I have tried to explain this more in terms of scope and tonality. Defoe promotes a form of colonial expansion that rests on a narrow understanding of white English masculinity. Equiano, in turn, imagines a British inclusiveness that is welcoming of difference, but is not necessarily less invested in a form of imperial capitalism. Their stories are entangled, also aesthetically. While Black writing is often discussed as imitative, it is in fact the marginalised perspective of the ex-slave in his retrospective narrative that can be considered foundational of a more realistic description of intersubjectivity in English writing. It is also more enmeshed in familial feeling, characteristic of the later domestic novel.

But before turning to the sphere of post-abolition literature of the nineteenth century, I will provide a detour in the following chapter to the more sentimentalist eighteenth-century imaginations of Sterne and Sancho for whom slavery becomes an artful digression in their letters and fictional writing that, on the one hand, adheres to the most conventionalised form of eighteenth-century fiction, and, on the other hand, circumnavigates the pitfalls of this literary style in a much more playful tonality than Defoe and Equiano.

## NOTES

1. A much shorter earlier version of the reading of Defoe has been previously published and is reproduced with permission of transcript: Haschemi Yekani, Elahe. 2019. Transatlantic Postcolonial (T)Races in the Classroom: From Defoe's Desert Island to Larsen's Quicksand and Black-ish Suburbia.

In *Who Can Speak and Who is Heard/Hurt? Facing Problems of 'Race', Racism and Ethnic Diversity in the Humanities in Germany*, ed. Mahmoud Arghavan, Nicole Hirschfelder, Luvena Kopp, and Katharina Motyl, 315–336. Bielefeld: transcript. DOI: 10.14361/9783839441039-016. A much shorter earlier version of the reading of Equiano has been published previously and is reproduced with permission of De Gruyter: Haschemi Yekani, Elahe. 2016. Feeling Modern: Narratives of Slavery as Entangled Literary History. In *The Humanities between Global Integration and Cultural Diversity*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Birgit Mersmann, 117–134. Berlin: De Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110452181-009.

2. In the following, quotes from the two primary sources *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe 2003 [1719]) and *The Interesting Narrative* (Equiano 2003 [1789]) will be abbreviated as RC and IN respectively in all in-text citations.
3. For a discussion of its foundational status as “Black autobiography”, cf. Costanzo (1987: 49–50).
4. Critical work that discusses the texts together often contrasts the racialised masculinities of Friday and Equiano rather than Crusoe and Equiano (cf. e.g. Gautier 2001).
5. Laura Doyle argues that “Equiano’s story represents the historical experience of many (including in large part his own), and Crusoe’s isolated life on an island does not” (2008: 191) contrasting Crusoe’s individualism with Equiano’s communalism. While my argument may appear similar, I wish to stress that Equiano is not simply representative of the enslaved as the historical subaltern, instead I suggest that his account is, in fact, closer to a realistic depiction of modern subjectivity in its constitutive dependency on intersubjective recognition. In this way, I also depart from Mallipeddi’s assertion that “[w]hereas Crusoe achieves his freedom in isolation, in the absence—or more properly, the strategic suppression—of group [...] association, Equiano makes his emotional attachments to the family and the nation, filiative and affiliative connections, the sine qua non of his self-realization” (2016: 205). He reads Equiano as promoting sentimentality “as a counterdiscourse of capitalist modernity” (2016: 9). In contrast to Mallipeddi who, in other words, argues that Equiano is the sentimental counter model to Defoe’s realism, I highlight the entangled use of realist foundational tonalities that provide Equiano with the means to claim modern subjectivity in ways that the adventurous phantasmatic account of Defoe does not. In this understanding, Equiano’s narrative if anything is “more” realistic than Defoe’s, not less.
6. Despite the apparent thematic similarities between the seafaring adventures of the two protagonists, no other of the discussed literary couples are

temporally as far apart as Defoe and Equiano. Whereas Sterne and Sancho, situated in between the two authors discussed here first, resort to the popular mode of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, the aesthetics of both Defoe and Equiano is, on the surface, far less emotionally loaded, and more indebted to the empiricist mode of description, which is why I characterise their tone as foundational for the rise of the novel. In contrast to the private sphere of Sterne's and Sancho's letters, they also were more involved in the public realm of politics, with Defoe's many forays into journalism, publishing, and eventually espionage, and Equiano's later career as a public spokesperson for abolition and his engagement in the ill-fated Sierra Leone resettlement scheme.

7. This can be seen in the novel's afterlife in the shortened updated versions in children's and young adults' fiction to this day.
8. Helga Schwalm calls providence and deliverance the leitmotifs of the Puritan spiritual autobiography to which *Robinson Crusoe* generically is indebted (cf. 2007: 240–241).
9. This is the common reconstruction of the timeline: Crusoe is born in 1632. The plot starts when he is eighteen in 1650. One year later, he embarks on his first journey; he is shipwrecked in 1659 when he is twenty-seven (in the text it says twenty-six which does not add up). After twenty-eight years on the island, he leaves in 1686 and after travelling again to Lisbon to sell his Brazilian plantation, he returns to England in 1687 after thirty-five years of absence (cf. Alkon (1979: 69) for a discussion of temporal inconsistencies). Crusoe finally gets married and has three children but returns to travelling to the East Indies in 1694 (at the age of sixty-two) when his wife (conveniently) dies giving him the opportunity to return to his "colony" (RC 240). This is a foreshadowing of the plot of the second part, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, which was published immediately following the first novel in 1719. This supposedly last part of Crusoe's tale, which ends in January 1705 with Crusoe's retirement at the age of seventy-two, is then followed by yet a third and final book which was published in 1720, called *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.
10. Cf. Wheeler's helpful explanation of the term "race" in eighteenth-century usage: "Until the very end of the century, variety, not race, was the scientific term of choice to designate different groups of people. [...] In its most common usage, *race* simply meant a group. [...] Conventionally, race meant family lineage, and it could apply generally to 'the race of man' (as distinct from animals); to a subgroup of people, such as the Irish race; or even to nonhuman objects, such as the vegetable race. Unlike today in Britain or the United States, race was not primarily a characteristic of minority populations. During the late eighteenth century, the word *race*

was used by some writers in recognizably incipient forms of its modern sense—denoting a fairly rigid separation among groups. At this time, skin color was the most typical way to differentiate ‘races’” (2000: 31).

11. Carey (2009), for instance, criticises Hulme in this regard and emphasises a broader spectrum of servitude in the eighteenth century (cf. also Boulukos 2008: 76–77; Swaminathan and Beach 2013).
12. Cf. Hartman’s elaborations on the history of slavery: “The very term ‘slavery’ derived from the word ‘Slav,’ because Eastern Europeans were the slaves of the medieval world. At the beginning of modernity, slavery declined in Europe as it expanded in Africa, although as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was still possible to purchase ‘white’ slaves—English, Spanish, and Portuguese captives in the Mediterranean ports of North Africa. [...] It was not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the line between the slave and the free separated Africans and Europeans and hardened into a color line” (2008: 5).
13. Hence, in many ways, like in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* ([1610–11] in Shakespeare 1998), it is in fact the Mediterranean rather than the Atlantic that is the first location of encounters with slavery and Otherness in the novel. Thus, the “Old” and “New World” are symbolically linked.
14. In this passage, Xury himself seems happy to consent to this transaction: “[H]e would give the boy an obligation to set him free in ten years, if he turn’d Christian; upon this, and Xury saying he was willing to go to him, I let the captain have him” (RC 29). I will come back to such ostensibly non-realist elements of the story that can be read as wish-fulfilment and that are repeated in Friday’s consensual subjugation.
15. In fact, the plot of *Robinson Crusoe* coincides with massive European colonial expansion of the British, Dutch, and French during the mid-seventeenth-century sugar boom in the Caribbean which led to these “new” colonial powers increasingly supplanting Spanish and Portuguese dominance in the transatlantic trade in people and goods (cf. Barrett 2014: 22–26). It is therefore also no coincidence that the economic rivals from (Catholic) Southern Europe are delineated in the mentioned colour-coded derogative language at the time.
16. In response to the two opposing viewpoints in Eric Williams’s *Capitalism & Slavery* (1994 [1944]) and Winthrop D. Jordan’s *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* from 1968, there is a continuing controversial debate in American studies whether slavery gave rise to racism, or racism to chattel slavery.
17. Erroneously, the title qualifies all twenty-eight years as solitary when, in fact, Friday joins Crusoe for the final three, which highlights the fact that Friday is not “fully” human.

18. Cf. Ellis (1996) for a discussion of the trope of cannibalism in *Robinson Crusoe* and texts modelled after it.
19. Overton also highlights the importance of dreams which eventually become true in both Crusoe's and Equiano's accounts (cf. 1992: 306).
20. For a discussion of the early modern meanings of different complexions in general and "olive-coloured" skin in particular, cf. Groebner (2004).
21. Despite the explicit characterisation in the text, there is a persistent "Africanization" (Wheeler 1995: 847) of Friday in the cultural imaginary. This trend shapes film adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe* to this day (for an explicit focus on filmic *Robinsonades*, cf. Mayer 2002). But it can already be witnessed in the eighteenth-century visual representations of Friday in book illustrations, which either follow said Africanisation, or, alternatively, resort to images closer to the myth of the "noble savage". This visual ambiguity of Friday also points to the complicated colonial constellation of the diminishing indigenous and the growing African enslaved populations in the Caribbean.
22. Wheeler emphasises that in addition to civility and religion, complexion becomes a marker of difference (cf. 2000: 260). The term "white" was used mostly in the colonies to describe all Europeans, as does Friday. Wheeler argues that the British at that time did not consider themselves a "white people", rather, "they believed themselves to be Christians or denizens of a civil society who possessed a white complexion" (2000: 272).
23. Postcolonial rewritings, like Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* (1980) and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (2007 [1986]), begin from a similar critique of the Friday character and offer creative re-arrangements of the power dynamics in the story.
24. Moreover, Friday's speech at times functions as an amusing interlude, which can be observed in the episode when they encounter a bear: "'O! O! O!' says *Friday*, three times, pointing to him; 'O Master; You give me te leave, me shakee te hand with him: Me make you good laugh.' I was surpris'd to see the fellow so pleas'd. 'You fool you,' says I, 'he will eat you up!'—'Eatee me up! Eatee me up!' says *Friday*, twice over again [...]" (RC 231). Here he comes across as an overzealous "buffoon" trying to please his master, which ties in with later stereotypical depictions of Black men in the Southern United States.
25. Bill Overton similarly speaks of "a narrative contrivance on Defoe's part which naturalises Friday's slavery" and turns him into "that unusual paradox, a willing slave" (1992: 303).
26. Alkon reads this as contributing to "temporal verisimilitude by implying a fictive future to succeed the narrated past and narrating present" (1979: 199).



27. Schwalm speaks of a “prioritisation of the economic drive for autonomy” (2007: 243, my translation) and later argues: “Crusoe’s self-fashioning resembles autonomy that escalates into solipsism which needs to subjugate, or rather destroy the other or completely demarcate oneself of the other” (2007: 248, my translation).
28. Cf. White (2006: 110–111) for a discussion of the footnote in the context of abolition.
29. Both *Captain Singleton* (1810a [1720]) and *Colonel Jack* (1810b [1722]) also address the topic of slavery, but they do so in the plot-centred and episodic style of narration of the *Farther Adventures* rather than in the self-reflexive tone of *Robinson Crusoe*. Interestingly, in an episode of *Captain Singleton*, the protagonists come across a ship that has been taken over by 600 enslaved people who apparently killed the white slavers. On board the Quaker William Walter has much trouble restraining Singleton and his crew from avenging the white men and can only appease the pirates by suggesting that they would have acted the same, had they been “sold for slaves without their consent” (Defoe 1810a [1720]: 261). Here, in fact, the right to resist or Black agency is at least briefly imagined (before the pirates sell the people on the ship to their profit). What is more, the perished white men are described as barbarous French or Dutchmen who abused and raped women and children and thus bringing the wrath of the Black men upon them and implying that a civilised (implicitly English) manner might have prevented the mutiny altogether. For discussions of slavery in *Captain Singleton*, cf. Aravamudan (2013); Wheeler (2000: 90–136) and for *Colonel Jack*, cf. Boulukos (2008: 75–94).
30. Cathy N. Davidson speaks of the text’s “novelistic emphasis on self-creation” (2006: 19).
31. I reconstruct his biography from the literary source here. Whether Equiano was born in 1745 in present-day Nigeria or, in fact, in South Carolina in the United States remains unclear to date.
32. Davidson in contrast maintains that Equiano should be considered the “Father of the American Novel” (2006: 25).
33. Lincoln Shlensky contends that Equiano’s account is also a symptom of the “paradox of slave memory” (2007: 111) understood as communal trauma.
34. In addition to the split between the two voices of a younger experiencing Equiano and the present mature narrating Equiano, Gates (1988: 153) identifies the use of the trope of chiasmus as a chief rhetorical strategy in the text.
35. Collins comments on the contrast of the “apparent boundlessness of the seas and the very real shackles of the slave ship” (2006: 215).

36. Lowe, too, stresses that Equiano's text disrupts the autobiography as a form of "liberal progress" by employing "multivocality" and "temporal digression" (2015: 60).
37. Cf. Wood (2010) for a discussion how the image of the *Brookes* was exploited in the 2007 memorial events. He argues, "The very familiarity of the image appears to have given it a reassuring rather than a horrific affect" (2010: 169).
38. Suicide is referenced once more when Equiano describes how Africans try to kill themselves by jumping overboard or starving themselves, often being severely punished for these attempts to become masters of their own fates (cf. IN 107–108).
39. Carl Plasa calls this "figurative counter-appropriations" (2000: 15), by framing self-starvation, for instance, as the counter-model to being devoured by the white slavers (2000: 19). Moreover, Rice links the trope of cannibalism to economic exploitation, arguing that "slavery is a cannibalistic process, a form of economic cannibalism (or vampirism) that sucks the life-blood of the enslaved Africans" (2003: 133). Mark Stein discusses the genre of the Robinsonade in relation to the trope of cannibalism, which, he argues, Equiano adapts or "cannibalizes" to serve his needs (2004: 105; cf. also Shlensky 2007: 115). Sussman analyses how tropes of cannibalism and disgust at colonial commodities appeared in consumer protests against slavery (cf. 2000: 15).
40. Focusing on Equiano's depiction of Native Americans, Emily Donaldson Field argues that Equiano's identity construction is reliant on a triangulation of power relations between Native, African, and European (cf. 2009: 29). She posits, "In Equiano's *Narrative*, the Miskito Indians serve as placeholders of the category of the primitive, displaying for readers how far Equiano himself has moved beyond that earlier stage of development and staving off the possibility that he will regress" (2009: 25); cf. also Lowe (2015: 64).
41. The story of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, which was "related" rather than "written" by himself, similarly recounts the initial overwhelmingly positive affective investment into England: "I entertain'd a notion that if I could get to ENGLAND I should never more experience either cruelty or ingratitude [...]" (in Carretta 2004: 45).
42. Shlensky too emphasises Equiano's fear of lynching and reenslavement in the "wild American colonies" (2007: 120) but similarly struggles with Caldwell's reading that links Britishness exclusively to whiteness. Shlensky instead focuses more on religious conversion as a way to overcome past trauma (cf. 2007: 117).
43. According to Innes, Equiano becomes a "resourceful Crusoe figure" (2002: 41; cf. also Caldwell 1999: 270; Ogude 1982: 38) and Aravamudan

argues that Equiano “reflect[s] in racial terms” (1999: 249) picaresque tropes of *Robinson Crusoe*.

44. Boulukos, for instance, discusses the supposed paradox of “Equiano’s repeated desire for an ‘English’ identity, and his positive portrayal of slavery within Africa” (2007: 247; cf. also Boulukos 2008: 188).
45. Bernhard Klein similarly argues, “Equiano did not benefit from the entirely artificial setup devised by Defoe, because where *Crusoe* was an isolated individual living in a non-competitive world, with no one to threaten his possessions or lay claim to scarce commodities, Equiano had to prove his mercantile credentials in a complex social scenario that was as disadvantageous and hostile to him as was possible in the period” (2004: 104).
46. From time to time, there is a sort of transference of feeling in the narrative, for instance, when his benevolent master weeps on his behalf when he is abused in Georgia (cf. IN 129). Thus, Boulukos argues that the required display of gratitude to those who set him free is “coercive” rather than a “sentimental sensation” (2008: 192).
47. Wheeler points out that such marriages were a delicate subject in fiction because the Black husband becomes the proprietor of his white wife under English marriage laws which only recognised the body of the man in a marriage (cf. 2000: 283).
48. Equiano speaks of the “bashfulness” of the African women and praises their sexual chasteness (IN 38). Nussbaum (2001: 60) reads these initial descriptions of African chastity in the context of travel writing and understands notions of civilisation and gender order as intertwined.
49. Equiano campaigns for legal intermarriage in the colonies as a means to guard Black women from sexual exploitation (cf. Wheeler 2000: 285) and Aravamudan argues that Equiano prepares his readers by “discussing other successful interracial marriages” (1999: 284).
50. Aravamudan thus situates Equiano’s text in the “neocolonial ethos of the abolitionist debates in the 1790s and 1800s” (1999: 237) and to support this argument discusses Equiano’s involvement in the settlement project in Sierra Leone in greater detail.
51. Boulukos speaks of “anti-slavery colonialism” (2008: 179) in this context, foreshadowing nineteenth-century developments (cf. Wheeler 2000: 283).
52. Doyle for instance posits: “Equiano’s ‘awakening’ from his shipwreck swoon into bold resistance and ethical leadership contrasts with *Crusoe*’s awakening into slave trading and a narrative that veils exactly this African-Atlantic agency” (Doyle 2008: 195).

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## CHAPTER 3

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# Digressions: Sancho and Sterne

To this day, reading novels is tied to the pleasurable activity of immersing oneself in stories, to digress from the ordinary. However, when this digression includes the depiction of the pain of others, the often cosy “familial feeling” can also morph into the more problematic paternalistic feeling for others. In literary sentimentalism the depiction of enslavement is frequently reduced to scenes of spectacular Black suffering and tearful white pity. As outlined in the introduction, the overlaps between this mode of writing and abolitionist discourse have garnered most attention and criticism in eighteenth-century studies. In his monograph on the politics of sensibility, Markman Ellis accordingly emphasises the limitations of sentimentalism as a form of political agitation (cf. 1996: 83). This “public sentimental rhetoric” (Carey 2005: 60–61) links the private and familial sphere with the political debate of the day (maybe more explicitly than later Victorian domestic novels would). On the one hand, the fact that slavery became a prominent topic in a broad range of texts in the 1760s and 1770s demonstrates that there is public concern around anti-slavery or at least amelioration, even predating the peak of the abolitionist campaign. On the other hand, the reliance on idealised sentimental versions of white benevolence in the face of Black anguish is at risk of constructing sensibility as the unique capacity of those supposedly more refined. Thus, to understand the rise of the British novel and its reliance on “familial feeling”, epistolary novels and published letters appear especially relevant for the growing permeability of the public sphere for authors from the middle

ranks who conversed about political and everyday occurrences. In this context, the exchange of letters between Ignatius Sancho and Laurence Sterne is extremely valuable as both participated in but also transformed conventions of literary sentimentalism and how readers were to imagine feeling subjects.

Sancho and Sterne—connected via the Montagu family—are the only two writers joined in a chapter in this book who actually communicated with and cross-referenced each other and thus embody the most literal sense of entangled tonalities. Their digressive styles, I argue, are atypical of more straightforward sentimentalism in the wake of Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (2004 [1747–1748]), associated, for example, with authors such as Sarah Scott and Henry Mackenzie.<sup>1</sup> Both, while certainly relying on what Carey calls the “sentimental parable” (2005: 49), promote a more playful adoption of tears and blushes. Sancho and Sterne do not simply reproduce sentimentalised heroic depictions of African sorrow which shape the ensuing ameliorationist discourse in the mid-eighteenth century. Their tonality is also less moralistic and part of a much more humorous conception of familial feeling than the one found in the foundational narratives of Defoe and later Equiano. Their writing reveals the generic conventionality of sentimentalism combined with digressions on the topic of enslavement and thus provides pathos and entertainment. They also do not shy away from displaying aesthetic artifice in their prose. Their digressive styles, in fact, may have contributed more to the aesthetic development of novelistic writing than the political debate of the day. Sterne and Sancho are not invested in providing a realistic portrayal of a middle-class individual as Defoe or a feeling Black subject like Equiano. Instead, both emphasise the power of writing that reflects on its own capacity to instil emotions.

Sancho, the shopkeeper, witnesses political upheaval and engages in various topics but, at the same time, is concerned with the well-being of his kin and his correspondents. His letters, which, Carey maintains, are structured “in the form of an epistolary novel of sentiment” (2004: 82), are not a simple appeal to white compassion but prove that he already is a man of feeling, that “peculiarly eighteenth-century phenomenon of a man who both interprets and communicates with the world through the medium of his own emotions” (Carey 2003: 9). In comparison to the other transatlantic authors discussed in this book, Sancho’s writing displays the most affective attachment to and comprehensive literary representation of his family life. His letters demonstrate how an Afro-British

subject partakes in the daily toils of London's growing mercantile class, communicating with bankers, booksellers, but also members of the servant class, including other Afro-Britons like Julius Soubise. It is this combination of familiarity with domestic matters and passing references to the grand political concerns such as slavery but also the Gordon riots and the American Revolution that marks what I describe as the digressive tonality of Sancho.

Sterne, the "provincial" clergyman, is not personally affected by the politics of London. He demonstrates literary bravura not in his letters but in his fictions that employ different personae and a highly intrusive narrative commentary to challenge conventions of writing. Sterne famously promotes a way of storytelling that has been characterised as postmodern *avant la lettre*, destabilising more predictable linear prose. Sterne's convoluted attempt to reconstruct Tristram Shandy's family and life story as well as his *Sentimental Journey* are both panoramic in scope and familial in emotional address. Especially his tone in relation to constructions of masculinity (and the charge of "effeminacy" attached to sentimentalism) is often satirical. John Mullan describes this as Sterne's departure from more conventional codes of sentimentalism:

While Richardson had attempted to exercise strict moralistic control over the interpretation of his novels, distrusting the very literary form that he was using, Sterne was willing to accept fashion as a virtue, trusting to the capacities of the private reader, and making his very life as an author (in the personae of Tristram or Yorick) a fiction to flaunt in the face of his critics. (2002: 149)

Accordingly, Mullan reads Sterne as both sentimental and self-reflexive, shaping a literary style that promotes moral ambiguities rather than edification.

Artifice and authenticity are conflictively related in the extroverted and stylised displays of feeling in both authors' texts but there are different things at stake for Sancho and Sterne. Sterne employs aesthetic playfulness to set himself apart from literary predecessors, Sancho uses it to claim a part in the culture of taste and sensibility. Since Sancho considers Sterne his most beloved literary writer, the question of influence and imitation remains relevant and has shaped the reception of their exchange. I read Sancho and Sterne's literary adoption of a digressive tonality distinctly not as imitative but as entangled in their different attempts to create attention

in the growing public sphere. Accordingly, I will begin by discussing Sancho's letters to focus on the points of connection and distinction between both writers. The famous dash in Sterne is often associated with a mimicking of intrusive thoughts and a meandering of the storyteller. The political digressions in his texts are tied into more bawdy episodes. His scenes dealing with slavery in this way, while not necessarily only sentimental, still elude ideas of political solidarity by never committing fully to the consequences of these reflections. Sancho's interjections of emotional concern not only highlight his capacity to feel (as well as his attachment to his family), in adopting the Sternian digressive dash, or in what I call his "dashing familiarity", he does not adhere to the usual linear form of redemptive abolitionist writing and displays a uniquely Black aesthetic voice, albeit one that also reproduces deprecating sentimental tropes. This needs to be read as more than simply imitative or as mimicry in Homi Bhabha's terms. While Sterne remains more elusive in his aestheticised divagations, Sancho's digressive tone, I argue, intervenes more fundamentally into the sentimental romance with the cultured, feeling subject of modernity.<sup>2</sup>

#### DASHING FAMILIARITY: IGNATIUS SANCHO'S LETTERS

Predating the publication of Equiano's *Narrative* by seven years, Ignatius Sancho's letters were published posthumously in London in 1782 in two volumes edited by Frances Crewe,<sup>3</sup> as was customary in the eighteenth century by subscription as *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, An African* (cf. Descargues 1991 on the history of the different editions). While almost all texts of the early Black Atlantic can be considered life writing in the broadest sense, it is often no longer possible to distinguish fact from fiction as was evident already in Equiano's case. Brycchan Carey turns our attention to this problem of autobiography in relation to Sancho. There exists a short contemporary biography of Sancho ("The Life of Ignatius Sancho") by Joseph Jekyll accompanying the publication of the letters which, according to Carey (2003), has been reproduced uncritically as factual for too long. Nevertheless, for my enquiry it is not quite so relevant whether the life story of Sancho (and that of other authors of the Black Atlantic) is in fact true. I am interested in their life writing as a way to express an emotional attachment to Britain and the family. The story of Sancho, following Jekyll's account, reads as follows: He was born around 1729, supposedly during the Middle Passage, shipped to New Granada

where he was baptised Ignatius. At the age of two, he was given to three English sisters as a “gift”; they named him Sancho with reference to Cervantes’s famous literary character. After being maltreated there, it is their neighbour the second duke of Montagu, John Montagu, who “saves” and educates Sancho, so that he eventually can work as a butler for the family after the duke’s death and later as a valet for the late duke’s son-in-law, who becomes the new duke of Montagu after the title had initially been rendered extinct.<sup>4</sup> Increasingly ill and immobile, Sancho leaves the family service and with their financial assistance can establish a grocery store in Westminster in 1774 together with his wife, Anne. They had seven children and theirs is one of the very few recorded marriages between a man and a woman of African descent at the time.<sup>5</sup> Sancho became quite renowned during his lifetime following the inclusion of his correspondence with Sterne in the posthumous publication of Sterne’s letters in 1775 (cf. Carey 2005: 57).<sup>6</sup> Suffering from the gout, Sancho died on 14 December 1780 before the abolitionist debate really garnered widespread public attention. In addition to fashioning himself as an African man of letters, Sancho was also very likely the first man of African descent to have voted in the parliamentary elections of 1774 and 1780 given his status as a householder in Westminster (cf. Carretta 2004) and is now commemorated as such.<sup>7</sup>

Sancho’s letters obviously pose something of an abnormality at a time when most enslaved Africans in the diaspora were still far from being recognised as human beings, let alone citizens. To stay within the picture of entanglement, to contextualise his texts, we need to further enquire into the convergence of modernity and enslavement and the paradoxical coincidence of the age of reason with unfreedom. If it were true then that Sancho was born during the Middle Passage, this would indeed turn him into the “poster child” of the early Black Atlantic revolution. His mother died of an unspecified disease while his father committed suicide, according to Jekyll’s unverifiable account (cf. Jekyll in LIS 5). As has been mentioned, Gilroy understands death—suicide, but also filicide<sup>8</sup>—as the most radical form of agency resisting the dehumanisation of slavery (cf. 1993: 68). For a few privileged Black subjects at the time, agency could also be found in reading and writing. For Sancho, letters are a means to communicate as a subject. In contrast to his ancestors, he can resort to narrative self-fashioning that connects literacy and familiarity. However, unlike Equiano’s later account which offers the first comprehensive narrative of a Black life story and voices political demands on behalf of the

enslaved—and hence was considered first in relation to Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe* as foundational of modern subjectivity—Sancho’s letters are more erratic and digressive in tone. His writing was not read primarily as a political pamphlet but still as a curious display of intellect that people of African descent supposedly lacked altogether.<sup>9</sup> One has to bear in mind that while Sancho’s letters were published in the early 1780s when the abolitionist debate started to take hold and thus clearly also received within that context, they were written earlier in the late 1760s and 1770s.<sup>10</sup>

Initial literary critics of Sancho’s writing often read his aspiring to the eighteenth-century culture of taste as self-indulgent and apolitical. Superficially, Sancho, the sentimental and privileged man of letters, was conceived as an “Uncle Tom” in contrast to abolitionist campaigner Equiano who was likened to Malcolm X (cf. Innes 2000: 20; 2002: 28).<sup>11</sup> An even sharper contrast can be established to the ostensibly more radical later writing of Robert Wedderburn. While Equiano finds his allegiance in the religious cause of the dissenting Methodists and abolition, Wedderburn takes to those working-class circles that Sancho deprecates as anarchists, later still, Seacole flaunts her maternal military inclusion. In comparison to the other three Black Atlantic writers considered in this book then, Sancho is the only one who, at the time of writing his letters, had already arrived in the centre of the empire’s capital with some footing. He repeatedly stresses his allegiance to the monarchy, which his contemporary biographer Jekyll praises as his “wild patriotism” (in LIS 8). Sandiford (1988: 83) cites Sancho’s supposedly reactionary stance in the Gordon riots as a case in point when he condemns the group of demonstrators who sought to repeal the Catholic Relief Act of 1778. British Roman Catholics did not have civil rights at the time and the radical Protestant Association led crowds to the streets in a two-week riot in June 1780—which notably included Black men and women (cf. Fryer 2010: 96). The members of the so-called mob also freed large numbers of prisoners, many of them debtors rather than criminals. Controversy is linked to the army’s brutal response, killing more than three hundred and giving any form of political protest the semblance of lower class unruliness. Sancho’s engagement with public political discourse in the letters is thus not restricted to abolition but showcases the contemporary tensions between Protestants and Catholics (and I will come back to the question in how far this theme is also a sub-text for Sterne’s reference to slavery) as well as the uncertain fate of the American colonies in the War of Independence. Being both of African descent and loyal to British political interests and the monarchy seems

possible because he and his family are located already within the heart of metropolitan Britishness (and a more comfortable life due to his position as a grocer).<sup>12</sup>

During the Gordon riots and towards the end of his life the beleaguered shop owner Sancho finds himself in “the midst of the most cruel and ridiculous confusion” as he describes the scene to “his good friend” the draper and banker John Spink, the recipient of several letters dealing with the riots dated from 6 to 13 June 1780. Sancho speaks of the madness of Lord Gordon and “the worse than Negro barbarity of the populace” (LIS 217). Is this phrase simply “doubly ironic”, as editor Carretta suggests in the explanatory notes (in LIS 318), because Sancho is living proof of a cultured African despite the presence of Black rioters? Sancho is certainly loyal to the crown, but he also contemplates the relevance of liberty and fears that the crowds are being misled. He is looking to the nation and the family to provide law and order, to “send these deluded wretches safe to their homes, their families, and wives!”. The young protesters on the streets are met with a combination of disdain and pity by the aging Sancho.

He describes the whole scene in the following terms:

This—this—is liberty! genuine British liberty!—This instant about two thousand liberty boys are swearing and swaggering by with large sticks—thus armed in hopes of meeting with the Irish chairmen and labourers—all the guards are out—and all the horse [sic];—the poor fellows are just worn out for want of rest—having been on duty ever since Friday.—Thank heaven, it rains; may it increase, so as to send these deluded wretches safe to their homes, their families, and wives! About two this afternoon, a large party took it into their heads to visit the King and Queen, and entered the Park for that purpose—but found the guard too numerous to be forced, and after some useless attempts gave it up.—It is reported, the house will either be prorogued, or parliament dissolved, this evening—as it is in vain to think of attending any business while this anarchy lasts.

I cannot but felicitate you, my good friend, upon the happy distance you are placed from our scene of confusion. (LIS 218–219)

Sancho repeatedly voices concern for the state of British liberty and is also keenly aware that the riot impacts his business (and in a following letter laments the attack on property, including that of Lord Mansfield). He calls the rioters “liberty boys”, possibly alluding to the American “Sons of Liberty” who had formed to oppose British colonial rule. However, in the



postscript, he also expresses more ambivalent sentiments, highlighting his African origin—stating, “I am not sorry I was born in Afric [sic]”—which stands in contrast to the “Negro barbarity” of the beginning of the letter. It is as if by way of writing, Sancho tries to make sense of the “scene of confusion”, offering his eye-witness account. The acts of violence make him long for a safer distance and a recluse to the realm of the family—a route he wishes the protesters would follow as well. At the same time, he sincerely hopes “they do not some of them lose their lives of liberty before the morning” and he finally ruminates that “there is more at the bottom of this business than merely the repeal of an act—which has as yet produced no bad consequences [...]”.<sup>13</sup> The sectarian tensions seem like a subterfuge to Sancho, who liberally confesses: “I am for an [sic] universal toleration” (LIS 219). Ellis further explains that the anti-Catholicism of the protesters was also fuelled by xenophobia and it is too easy to simply “denounce” Sancho’s politics. Instead, he argues, “The libertine turn in Sancho’s *Letters* thus rounds out, and subverts, the picture of Sancho as a conservative and patriotic Whig” (2001: 208).

In a 1782 review of the letters, Sancho is praised for his “playful familiarity of friendship” and “the ardour of genuine patriotism”.<sup>14</sup> It is the increasingly insecure position of England in the world (rather than religious tensions in the country) that causes Sancho most worry and characterises his patriotism. These global threats to the nation’s stability can only be compensated by the safe haven of the family, which also informs the tone of the final letter in the series to Spink and again gives more room to good wishes to and from his friend:

For your kind anxiety about me and family, we bless and thank you.—I own, at first I felt uneasy sensations—but a little reflection brought me to myself.—Put thy trust in God, quoth I.—Mrs. Sancho, whose virtues outnumber my vices (and I have enough for any one mortal) feared for me and for her children more than for herself. [...].

America seems to be quite lost or forgot amongst us;—the fleet is but a secondary affair.—Pray God send us some good news, to chear [sic] our drooping apprehensions, and to enable me to send you pleasanter accounts;—for trust me, my worthy friend, grief, sorrow, devastation, blood, and slaughter, are totally foreign to the taste and affection of

Your faithful friend  
and obliged servant,  
I. SANCHO.

Our joint best wishes to Mrs. S[pink], self, and family. (LIS 224)

Feeling, family, and national belonging are entangled here as elsewhere. In his letters, Sancho mentions his African origins often, but he certainly will appear more familiar than foreign to his British correspondents, an effect that I call his “dashing” familiarity. Sancho mocks his concerned wife, “whose virtues outnumber [his] vices”, as he writes in one of the many parentheses, inserting little afterthoughts and witticisms. America appears lost and instead of contemplating these political grievances, he would prefer to speak of topics more suitable to his refined “taste and affection”. In relation to his family, Sancho displays a gentle version of masculinity and since, as mentioned, he is not married to a white woman, the constraints of modesty are also less severe. It is in this familial tone and speaking in the name of the “Sanchos” that he sends “our joint best wishes” to “Mrs Spink, self, and family”. Clearly then his descriptions of his emotional ties to his children and wife Anne, whom he mentions in the majority of all his letters referring to them even as his “Sanchonetta’s”,<sup>15</sup> add to this impression of an amusing familiar conversationalist. It also marks him as a complex affectionate modern person whose conception of family corresponds to Stone’s aforementioned famous descriptions of the rise of a new type of affective family in the eighteenth century (cf. 1977: 7). Sancho is the embodiment of a head of the family who shows a keen interest in both his private affairs and the public political debate, shaped by his, for the time, indeed, extraordinary status as a Black citizen in England.

The fate of the newly independent United States and the war with France is one such ongoing concern, not only in the correspondence about the Gordon riots. In 1777, in an earlier letter and in light of the American Revolution, Sancho had still voiced hope that the thirteen colonies would return to allegiance with the “mother country” and that the “British empire be strongly knit in the never-ending bands of sacred friendship and brotherly love” (LIS 106). By 1780, after the riots subside, he writes much more solemnly, “How the affair will end, God only knows!—I do not like its complexion.—Government has ordered them to give up their arms—if they do, where is British liberty? if they refuse, what is administration?” (LIS 227). Can British liberty be reconciled with the conception of the colonies tied to England in “sacred friendship and brotherly love”? While early Black British subjects often referenced American slavery as a negative foil against which to praise British progressive enlightenment, Sancho is concerned more with the state of the empire as a bond between nations equally invested in their love of liberty, as a more egalitarian “brotherly bond”, not necessarily one of authoritarian

“parental control”. He is still writing with the early (or “first”) British empire in mind and is a witness to the beginning of a new phase. In the course of the late eighteenth century it is the exploration and settlement of the Pacific that shape British colonial ambitions which leads Black British subjects to voice their paradoxical support for Britain’s empire as more advanced than the (economically declining) American slave economy. Equiano, Wedderburn, and Seacole all speak disparagingly of the injustices of the plantation system of the Caribbean and the US South and each see more or less potential in a British enlightened progressive abolitionism (which would not by default contradict even greater British global imperial expansion in the nineteenth century).<sup>16</sup> So, while Sancho is clearly invested in British politics, the references to slavery remain interspersed in more general deliberations about commerce and occasionally more sentimental reflections.

As mentioned initially, it seems unlikely that Sancho ever had first-hand experience of chattel slavery given his early relocation to England.<sup>17</sup> But he does take a cursory interest in the beginning abolitionist debate of the time and encourages some of his white addressees to show empathy for the plight of his “poor black brethren”. This evocation of (metaphorical) fraternity will become central as the mentioned inscription of the Wedgwood medallion “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?” in Evangelical abolitionist discourse but, in Sancho’s case, he is quite literally a family relation, the descendant of slaves. In a letter to Mr Browne, dated 18 July 1772, Sancho writes,

I thank you for your kindness to my poor black brethren—I flatter myself you will find them not ungrateful—they act commonly from their feelings:—I have observed a dog will love those who use him kindly—and surely, if so, negroes—in their state of ignorance and bondage will not act less generously, if I may judge them by myself—I should suppose kindness would do any thing with them;—my soul melts at kindness—but the contrary—I own with shame—makes me almost a savage. (LIS 45)

Despite the brotherly tie, in the quote, “negroes” are a group separate from him; he likens them to dogs, but also mentions their feelings, and, in the end, compares himself to a “savage” because of his own excessive affective attachment that sparks a shameful burst of anger at the thought of the maltreatment of them “in their state of ignorance and bondage”. The question whether the enslaved had feelings to begin with remains at

the core of the early abolitionist debate, and it is interesting how a Black sentimental writer acknowledges this conundrum. The context of this letter is not entirely clear, but here, as in other letters, Sancho seems to pass on advice to the son of a befriended family who is in a place from which Sancho asks him politely to send “half a dozen cocoa nuts” (LIS 45), presumably working in the Caribbean plantation economy where the young addressee has begun to build a career for himself. Sancho engages in the still ambivalent sentimental—oftentimes ameliorationist—literary response to the tropes of African suffering. Once more, rather than trying to pinpoint Sancho’s political stance on the matter, it is interesting to inquire into the tone of these letters that are not informed by the immediacy of the eye-witness account of the Gordon riots but adhere more to the style of a sentimental letter writer who intermingles his communication with political reflection, evident in his characteristic more convoluted and digressive interjections.

Sancho does not advocate the abolition of slavery but a more humane treatment of those in bondage, “to use” the enslaved “kindly” (like you would a dog who would come to “love” you as a result). Not uncommon for sentimental writing then, the letter really is based on the idealised assumption of a “grateful slave”, as Boulukos has shown (2008: 175), and showcases his own affection. Sancho is also concerned with the state of the young Englishman whose Christian morals should not be corrupted by the exposure to the brute force on the plantations. Consequently, despite construing a familial connection to the enslaved, this remains abstract throughout Sancho’s letters and cannot be compared to Wedderburn’s indignation at his maternal family’s suffering for instance.

On the occasion of receiving some abolitionist texts, he addresses the Philadelphian Quaker Mr Fisher,

Full heartily and most cordially do I thank thee—good Mr. F[isher], for your kindness in sending the books—that upon the unchristian and most diabolical usage of my brother Negroes—the illegality—the horrid wickedness of the traffic—the cruel carnage and depopulation of the human species—is painted in such strong colours—that I should think would (if duly attended to) flash conviction—and produce remorse in every enlightened and candid reader.—The perusal affected me more than I can express;—indeed I felt a double or mixt sensation—for while my heart was torn for the sufferings—which, for aught I know—some of my nearest kin might have undergone—my bosom, at the same time, glowed with gratitude—and

praise toward the humane—the Christian—the friendly and learned Author of that most valuable book. Blest be your sect! (LIS 111)

Again, familiarity is emphasised when he speaks of his “brother Negroes”. Sancho is overwhelmed by the feeling that his “nearest kin” could have undergone the horrors of slavery and thus certainly has a “legitimate claim” to a more immediate affective affliction than say his white fellow Britons. Interestingly, however, he does not talk about the fate of his actual parents, to whose life story biographer Jekyll seemed privy, despite Sancho’s young age at the time of their death. Rather than dwell on his immediate family, Sancho seems even more moved by the power of the word to engender such strong emotions, a torn heart for the suffering enslaved and a glowing bosom for the valuable book. On the one hand, this could be seen as his political conviction to further spread the word in the campaign against the slave trade. On the other hand, it can also be understood as buying into the spectacle of reading as a form of suffering through/for Others.

In the 1770s British ongoing interests in the plantation economy and the growing imperial ambitions overlap. Sancho also freely intermingles the general state of colonised populations in Africa and India with the system of enslavement in the Caribbean. This can be seen, for example, in the first letter of the second volume, addressed to Mr Jack Wingrave, another young family friend and son of John Wingrave, a bookbinder and seller with whom Sancho also exchanged letters, and who in 1778 is in India “seeking to make his fortune”, as Carretta’s notes put it (in LIS 254). I quote from this letter at some length here to give an impression of the abundance of interjections in Sancho’s prose:

My good friend, you should remember from whom they learnt those vices: [...] I am sorry to observe that the practice of your country (which as a resident I love—and for its freedom—and for the many blessings I enjoy in it—shall ever have my warmest wishes—prayers—and blessings); I say it is with reluctance, that I must observe your country’s conduct has been uniformly wicked in the East—West-Indies—and even on the coast of Guinea.—The grand object of English navigators—indeed of all christian [sic] navigators—is money—money—money—for which I do not pretend to blame them—Commerce was meant by the goodness of the Deity to diffuse the various goods of the earth into every part [...]:—the enlightened Christian should diffuse the riches of the Gospel of peace—with the commodities of his respective land—Commerce attended with strict honesty—

and with Religion for its companion—would be a blessing to every shore it touched at.—In Africa, the poor wretched natives—blessed with the most fertile and luxuriant soil—are rendered so much the more miserable for what Providence meant as a blessing:—the Christians’ abominable traffic for slaves—and the horrid cruelty and treachery of the petty Kings—encouraged by their Christian customers—who carry them strong liquors—to enflame their national madness—and powder—and bad fire-arms—to furnish them with the hellish means of killing and kidnapping.—But enough—it is a subject that sours my blood—and I am sure will not please the friendly bent of your social affections.—I mentioned these only to guard my friend against being too hasty in condemning the knavery of a people who bad as they may be—possibly—were made worse—by their Christian visitors.—Make human nature thy study—wherever thou residest—whatever the religion—or the complexion—study their hearts.—Simplicity, kindness, and charity be thy guide—with these even Savages will respect you—and God will bless you! (LIS 130–131)

Sancho’s letter comes in response to the young Englishman’s indignation at the “treachery and chicanery of the Natives” (LIS 130).

His reprimand of Wingrave stands in contrast to the kindness that the young Mr Browne supposedly demonstrated, and that Sancho praised in the earlier letter. Here Sancho wavers between patriotism and genuine critique. English colonial exploitation is linked to the “wicked” greed for money (repeated emphatically three times) and, at the same time, Sancho commends the potential civilisational benefits the “poor wretched natives” in Africa might enjoy if only a good Christian form of commerce prevailed. Sancho loves to be a “resident” in England, but also feels the need to defend the Africans, who were corrupted by their “Christian visitors”.<sup>18</sup> With the interjection “—But enough—” he stops himself halfway through because, again in true sentimental fashion, Sancho is afraid to be overpowered by his emotions as the topic of slavery “sours his blood”. What is more, not only is he moved by powerful feelings, he is also afraid to disturb the “social affections” of his addressee. Sympathy is interactive and is understood as potentially beneficial with respect to empathy with Others. The evil by-product of the conquests of “English navigators” is global misery. But this suffering, despite the distancing technique of speaking suddenly of “your country”, ends in a sentimental appeal to “study their hearts” using “simplicity, kindness, and charity”. This shows that what starts off as an indignant assessment of the ails of colonisation and enslavement ebbs into platitudes of sentimentalism, which Ellis characterises as

a mode of writing that engages the sympathies or affections of the reader, advertising virtuous and benevolent conduct by repeatedly displaying scenes of feeling and distress. These scenes engage the emotions of the reader by exhibiting the work of emotions in the characters, who often make a luxurious display of their tears, blushes and faintings. (2001: 200)

It is exactly this recourse to sentimental prose that demonstrates that Sancho is in fact more familiar with the discourse of feeling of his country of residence than the vast global geography of English exploitation or the dire fate of the enslaved which, within the letter of the London resident, becomes simply “the East—West-Indies—and even [...] the coast of Guinea”. On the one hand, Sancho in many letters reproduces what Ellis calls “scenes of feeling and distress”. “The poor wretched natives” become a signpost for how slavery affects his sensitive temperament (or threatens to corrupt impressionable young Englishmen). On the other hand, the letter does engage in an albeit always polite critique of his addressee and urges him to recognise the humanity of his Indian counterparts despite difference in complexion and religion. Howsoever we interpret Sancho’s political standpoint here then, aesthetically, he is certainly “advertising virtuous and benevolent conduct”. Accordingly, what is remarkable in his positionality is that his writing is not appealing to a close bond with “African suffering” but rather to a metropolitan sensibility that is affected from afar, an affliction that is best communicated in the realm of letter writing.

While not quite fainting and blushing, in a letter to Mrs C[ocksedge] Sancho explicitly reflects on how he should best express his feelings as a sentimental man of letters:

Now, whether to address—according to the distant, reserved, cold, mechanical forms of high-breeding—where polished manners, like a horse from the manage, prances fantastic—and, shackled with the rules of art—proudly despises simple nature;—or shall I, like the patient, honest, sober, long-ear’d animal—take plain nature’s path—and address you according to my feelings? (LIS 105)

Over and over, his letters express concern not only with *what* he wants to communicate, but also *how* he should best do it (and how this in turn might affect his addressees).<sup>19</sup> In his cited images from the animal world, the bred horse, much like the aristocracy with their “polished manners”, is

seen as conceited and fake, while the hard-working mule, the decent middle-class man, displays true feelings. In spite of the humorous undertone, references to the animal kingdom remain complicated at a time when Black people are considered less than human and often pejoratively described as animal-like, a discourse that Sancho's comparison of the enslaved to dogs reproduces. Nevertheless, for Sancho concern about feeling and writing is not in contradiction to his status as an "African" in Europe. He even claims a distinctly African sensibility at one point: "I meant this—not as an epistle of cold thanks—but the warm ebullitions of African sensibility" (LIS 170). Despite the lack yet of a Black tradition in Europe, for Sancho, Africanness is compatible with metropolitan sentimental discourse, it might even add a distinctive "warmness" in its supposedly more immediate access to emotionality. And while there are no other Black authors he can cite, he provides intertextual references to earlier fictional depictions of non-white masculinities, most prominently Shakespeare's *Othello* ([1604] in Shakespeare 1998) and Behn's (2003 [1688]) *Oroonoko*,<sup>20</sup> to underline the humanity of the non-white subject as part of the refined world of literature and letters. However, the incoherence of these white imaginations of racialised masculinity, depicted either as savage beast or noble prince, obviously do not reflect the mundane experience of Sancho. Nussbaum explains: "It is difficult to conceive of a coherent black masculinity in the face of these popular representations, as fractured as they are between the ugly and the perfectly formed, the savage and the princely, the soft and the manly" (2001: 55). Sancho, rather than claim any of these extremes, promotes an image of a worldly and yet familiar masculinity that is linked to his harmonious family life.<sup>21</sup>

This is also advice he passes on to fellow Afro-Briton Julius Soubise, who became the subject of public satire following a rumoured affair with his benefactress the Duchess of Queensbury. Such display of "foppish" behaviour and rakish sexuality, especially involving white women, might undermine the already precarious status of Black masculinity. That is why, Sancho begs Soubise to leave behind such foolishness to better himself and not do injustice to his "noble patrons". While he is still in service for the Montagu family himself, Sancho writes in 1772,

Happy, happy lad! what a fortune is thine!—Look round upon the miserable fate of almost all of our unfortunate colour—superadded to ignorance,—see slavery, and the contempt of those very wretches who roll in affluence from our labours superadded to this woeful catalogue—hear the ill-bred and



heart-racking abuse of the foolish vulgar.—You, S[oubis]e, tread as cautiously as the strictest rectitude can guide ye—yet must you suffer from this—but armed with truth—honesty—and conscious integrity—you will be sure of the plaudit and countenance of the good [...]. (LIS 46)

The “woeful catalogue” that afflicts “almost all of our unfortunate colour” once more references slavery but only “superadded” to ignorance. Within this convoluted insertion the redundantly also “superadded” contempt of slaveowners could either be a result of enslavement or an addition to the list of miseries. For Sancho, the good fortune to be in the service of cultured English noblemen and noblewomen is an experience that Soubise should cherish, with enslavement understood again as a far-away abomination which leads to the display of foolish vulgarity, presumably by the “ill-bred” newly rich who have profited from the plantation economy, which he in turn usurps as “our labours”. Here Sancho at once construes an allegiance to those with whom he and Soubise share their “colour”, but he also expresses his loyalty to a cultured English aristocracy that seems exempt from partaking in the profits of enslavement.

In conversation with his correspondents, Sancho refuses being pinpointed to a position of either African or British, he reproduces stereotypes but also challenges conceit.

Sancho’s device of offering labels and stereotypes for his readers to refuse is also part and parcel of this technique as a letter writer, a conversationalist, who actively engages with his readers, and demands their involvement. In other words he is “writing to”, rather than “writing at” his readers. (Innes 2002: 35)

This strategy of “writing to”, as Innes calls it, can be linked to the concept of entanglement. Sancho is not writing back to Britishness from a position outside, rather he is a somewhat undecided, often digressive conversationalist positioning himself at times clearly at the centre of Britishness and at other times highlighting his differences.<sup>22</sup> Instead of dismissing this as another sign of Sancho’s supposedly lacking political awareness, I read this digressive tone as an aesthetic form of expressing and contesting modernity simultaneously. It is his genuinely conflicted positionality that seems well-matched in a tonality that continually stops to re-assess; this also leaves room for ambiguity and irony, which brings me to the question of literary influence and imitation.

As is widely noted, Sancho's sentimental tone displays a distinctly humorous Sternian undercurrent. Sandiford speaks of a "rhetoric of self-mockery" (1988: 84) that characterises his writing and regarding the adoption of language mocking Black people, for instance, Nussbaum argues that he exhibits "a playfulness and self-deprecating humour absent from Equiano" (2003: 210). In response to racist appellations, we can thus discern a distinct difference between the more sombre foundational tonality of Equiano's appeal to common humanity and Sancho's sentimental humour (and later Wedderburn's angry resisting tone, and Seacole's eventual laughing off racism as a gesture that consolidates her belonging to Britishness). Instead of prematurely labelling these forms of engagement with literary tonalities as imitative, I want to again make a case for an entangled point of view that recognises Black aesthetic agency *and* white reliance on Blackness as the "constitutive outside" of its own claim of artistic and cultural refinement. To Mr Stevenson Sancho writes,

Young says, "A friend is the balsam of life"—Shakspeare [sic] says,—but why should I pester you with quotations?—to shew you the depth of my erudition, and strut like the fabled bird in his borrowed plumage—in good honest truth, my friend—I rejoice to see thy name at the bottom of the instructive page—and were fancy and invention as much my familiar friends as they are thine—I would write thee an answer—or try, at least, as agreeably easy—and as politely simple.—Mark that; simplicity is the characteristic of good writing—which I have learnt, among many other good things, of your Honor—and for which I am proud to thank you; [...]. (LIS 51)

In this letter, Sancho stops himself after one quote by Young. The dash interrupts his impulse to demonstrate his learnedness by providing yet another quote from Shakspeare [sic], not to "pester" his friend or appear conceited. Playfully he goes on to define simplicity not only as the marker of good writing but also use this opportunity to pay his friend a compliment, as he has picked up this aesthetic virtue from him. To quote, to copy is to become a vain bird in "borrowed plumage". Sancho exuberantly acknowledges his literary influences, but he is also keen to demonstrate his own reflections on style. He is anxious to show off his erudition but not at the expense of individuality. Like Sterne's, Sancho's writing is not linear. And one could argue that it is precisely this propensity to digress and to scrutinise subjects from different angles that characterises this form of writing as self-reflexive and novelistic.

In 1766<sup>23</sup> then Sancho and Sterne communicate directly, tellingly on the topic of slavery. Sancho, in a request that Helena Woodard characterises as “deeply layered in diplomacy” (1999: 79), writes,

It would be an insult on your humanity (or perhaps look like it) to apologize for the liberty I am taking.—I am one of those people whom the vulgar and illiberal call “*Negurs*.” [sic]—The first part of my life was rather unlucky [...].—The latter part of my life has been—thro’ God’s blessing, truly fortunate, having spent it in the service of one of the best families in the kingdom.—My chief pleasure has been books.—Philanthropy I adore.—How very much, good Sir, am I (amongst millions) indebted to you for the character of your amiable uncle Toby!—[...] Your Sermons have touch’d me to the heart, and I hope have amended it, which brings me to the point.—In your tenth discourse [...] is this very affecting passage—“[...] Consider slavery—what it is —how bitter a draught—and how many millions are made to drink it!”—Of all my favourite authors, not one has drawn a tear in favour of my miserable black brethren—excepting yourself, and the humane author of Sir George Ellison.—I think you will forgive me;—I am sure you will applaud me for beseeching you to give one half hour’s attention to slavery, as it is at this day practised in our West Indies.—That subject, handled in your striking manner, would ease the yoke (perhaps) of many—but if only of one—Gracious God!—what a feast to a benevolent heart! (LIS 73–74)

In beseeching Sterne to give just “one half hour’s attention” to ameliorating the fate of the enslaved in “our West Indies”, Sancho seems to follow a very peculiar temporality, given the magnitude of a topic like slavery in relation to the attention span of a mere thirty minutes. Indeed, while Sancho adores philanthropy, his greatest pleasure are books. Hence, Sterne is the ideal addressee of Sancho’s appeal. He begs him to indulge in such an emotionalising digression and Sancho is aware of Sterne’s power to create familiarity with the fate of the enslaved in the increasingly public sphere of print culture (he is but one amongst the numerous admirers of Sterne). Slavery is a social evil that needs to be amended, but Sancho is not too concerned whether Sterne’s endorsement of the subject would improve the life of many or just one individual. The “many millions” that are affected by slavery, as Sancho quotes from Sterne’s sermon “Job’s Account of the Shortness and Troubles of Life” in his letter, are linked to the “millions” who are indebted to Sterne for creating the “amiable uncle Toby”. Accordingly, Sancho first establishes his love of books and philanthropy before addressing slavery, and it is precisely this perception of slavery as a

“feast to a benevolent heart”, which Festa calls the “self-satisfying nature of sentimental discourse” (2006: 85), that the tonality of philanthropy caters to.

Sterne replied favourably and includes Sancho’s letter in his own correspondence. For that purpose, he, in fact, edits some of Sancho’s mannered prose. In the version that was reproduced in Sterne’s posthumously published letters “the benevolent heart” is deleted to read simply, “what a feast”. Woodard analyses Sterne’s alterations in more detail and concludes, “The oratorical, emotional sermon like quality of Sancho’s epistolary style contrasts with Sterne’s more muted, formal epistolary style” (1999: 80).<sup>24</sup> Sancho’s letters in some way seem to imitate art and not life and show a keen awareness of aesthetics; Sterne’s own private communication is much more toned-down. In fact, Sterne’s letters are described as less remarkable by editors Melvyn New and Peter de Voogd who state that in them “his spontaneity was often forced, his sincerity dubious, and his sentiments rather commonplace” (in Sterne 2009a: lv). While Sterne seems to reserve his more extravagant prose for his fictional texts, Sancho uses his unique point of view as a way to fashion himself as a Sternian literary persona in real life. Ellis, too, highlights the importance of aesthetics here. “This literary aspect of Sancho’s letters suggests that the book asks to be read as a kind of Shandean epistolary novel, rather than as a biography in letters” (1996: 81).

In a letter to his friend Mr Meheux, who worked for the Board of Control, which oversaw imperial rule of India, Sancho sets out to defend “his Sterne” from scorn:

You had set up my bristles in such guise—in attacking poor Sterne—that I had quite forgot to give you a flogging for your punning grocery epistle—but omittance is no quittance.—Swift and Sterne were different in this—Sterne was truly a noble philanthropist—Swift was rather cynical;—what Swift would fret and fume at—such as the petty accidental *sourings* and *bitters* in life’s cup—you plainly may see, Sterne would laugh at—and parry off by a larger humanity, and regular good will to man. I know you will laugh at me—do—I am content;—if I am an enthusiast in any thing, it is in favor of my Sterne. (LIS 125)

Against the bitter satire of Swift, Sancho praises the combination of philanthropy and humour in “his” Sterne, no matter if he is mocked for his optimistic enthusiasm by his friend. Not simply pathetic in a tear-jerking

sentimental fashion, nor interested solely in political wit, both Sancho and Sterne promote a digressive tonality of “light” political engagement. If this aesthetic choice can be understood as entangled, do their unlike positionalities lead to a differential understanding of the use of this style by the two writers? The Black author must first establish his status as a feeling subject after all. Over and over, we see that in the campaign for abolition several arguments coincide: is it enough to claim that “the slave” has a soul (as exemplified in the willingness to convert to Christianity and be baptised), that he or she has feelings, or did they also have to prove intellectual capacities to be regarded as equal human beings? In Sancho’s aspiration to the ideal of the man of letters, he clearly links all three aspects: he talks of his love of books, his sorrows and joys regarding his family and God’s providence but also often mentions his pain and problems caused by his many illnesses. Sandiford argues, “the excesses of sensibility that abound in the *Letters* seem to function as compensatory defences; they are as much statements of conventional sentimentalism as they are expressions affirmative of human value” (1988: 86). However, instead of reading this simply as an “empowering” adoption of sentimentalism and a “compensatory” strategy, I understand Sancho and Sterne’s exchange as one form of how the success of the British novel was entangled with the transatlantic world and the ways in which the imagination of British progressiveness depended on an engagement with literary voices from the margins.<sup>25</sup>

### ELUDING SOLIDARITY: LAURENCE STERNE’S *TRISTRAM SHANDY* AND *A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY*

While Sancho writes deferentially to his literary idol, Sterne is also eager to capitalise on Sancho’s supposed authenticity as an admiring Black subject.<sup>26</sup> Sterne’s oeuvre demonstrates only a very fleeting interest in and no substantial discussion of slavery (and Britain’s role in the transatlantic economy). Ellis states, “The Sancho exchange showed the celebrated writer [Sterne] in a better light than many of his other letters, confirming him as a benevolent philanthropist rather than a rakish libertine” (2001: 201), as which he was denounced, for example, by Wilberforce. Thus, one could argue that it is really Sancho’s letters that elevate the real-life author Sterne (rather than his literary alter ego Yorick) to the level of a sentimental humanitarian which explains his interest in being endorsed by Sancho (cf. also Sandhu 1998: 92).<sup>27</sup> Consequently, in the following, I will not

attempt to offer comprehensive readings of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* but will focus on the well-known passages (and the by now numerous interpretations of them) that demonstrate Sterne's elusive responses to slavery and will also return once more to the "imitation debate" to suggest an entangled perspective on how the digressive tonalities of Sancho and Sterne speak to each other.

In his response to Sancho's letter (that may have been written with publication already in mind) Sterne expresses both his belief in a "brotherhood of man" and his trust in the power of the written word.

There is a strange coincidence, Sancho, in the little events (as well as in the great ones) of this world: for I had been writing a tender tale of the sorrows of a friendless poor negro-girl, and my eyes had scarce done smarting with it, when your Letter of recommendation in behalf of so many of her brethren and sisters, came to me—but why *her brethren?*—or your's, Sancho! any more than mine? It is by the finest tints, and most insensible gradations, that nature descends from the fairest face at St. James's, to the sootiest complexion in africa [sic]: at which tint of these, is it, that the ties of blood are to cease? [...] If I can weave the Tale I have wrote into the Work I'm [about]—tis at the service of the afflicted—and a much greater matter; for in serious truth, it casts a [...] sad Shade upon the World, That so great a part of it, are and have been so long bound in chains of darkness & in Chains of Misery; & I cannot but both respect and felicitate You, that by so much laudable diligence you have broke the one—& by falling into the hands of so good and merciful a family, Providence has rescued You from the other. (Sterne in LIS 332–333; cf. also Sterne 2009b, 504–505)

Sterne is alluding here already to the last volume of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, whose nine volumes were published in five instalments from 1759–1767, and which was something of a literary sensation all over London. The novel brought Sterne, who was also a Church of England vicar in Yorkshire, literary success late in life. Ellis summarises the debate on whether Sancho's letter could have had an impact on Sterne's decision to address the topic of slavery, which his insistence on the "strange coincidence" seems to refute: "The question of influence, and moreover the direction of the flow of this influence, has been much debated in Sterne scholarship; with most Sterneans concluding that Sancho's letter was a coincidence" because Sterne had completed the quoted "tender tale" in *Tristram Shandy* supposedly before Sancho's letter reached him. But Ellis critically offers that this "demotion as a source

is probably not accidental" (1996: 71). In many ways, Sancho's real-life letters—that adopt and adapt literary sentimentalism—can be read as a critical interlocution with British sentimentalism's bolstered image of benign humanitarianism which relied both on an excessive fascination with slavery and an avoidance of recognising the humanity of the enslaved.

Sterne, prompted by Sancho's request to pay attention "to slavery as it is at this day practised in our West Indies", not only liberally acknowledges Sancho's status as the "negro-girl's" brethren but also includes himself in a more expansive version of shared humanity.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the Biblical "chains of darkness", supposedly the ignorance that afflicts those "nonbelievers" of the "sootiest complexion", can only be shed by the endorsement of Christianity and diligent learning. Thus, Sancho's own "laudable" actions that broke these first chains are contrasted with the additional "Chains of Misery", seemingly referring to enslavement which Sancho was spared because of the "Providence" that befell him by being rescued by his British patron family. Once more, familiar Britishness is exempt from involvement in the enslavement of Africans but only credited with progressive humanitarianism. Moreover, Carol Watts observes that the language Sterne employs here "carries painterly references to a scale of tints and shades that suggest he is for all his humanitarian solidarity dealing in *representations*" (2007: 175). The letter never touches upon the actual political implications of outlawing the slave trade (and the financial repercussions for the British in "our West Indies") but seems more invested in the "Tale" and the "Work".<sup>29</sup> Sterne does not need to be reminded of the potential progressive impact that his writing might have on the larger public, he is already aware of it, and yet, he likes to come across in the letter as a modest poet in the "service of the afflicted". The sermon that Sancho quotes was originally published in the *Sermons of Mr Yorick* in 1760. Sterne the author appears happy to be conflated with his (potentially more) sympathetic fictional counterpart and for Sancho too, the two seem to overlap given his familiarity with the writing of Sterne/Yorick.<sup>30</sup> In the sermon, slavery does not refer to the transatlantic trade in human beings and the American system of chattel slavery but references "the slavery of body and mind" first in relation to Roman enslavement of prisoners of war and then offers a tirade of Sterne's anti-Catholic sentiment that condemns the horrors of the inquisition:

Consider slavery—what it is,—how bitter a draught, and how many millions have been made to drink of it;—which if it can poison all earthly happiness

when exercised barely upon our bodies, what must it be, when it comprehends both the slavery of body and mind?—To conceive this, look into the history of the Romish church and her tyrants, (or rather executioners) who seem to have taken pleasure in the pangs and convulsions of their fellow-creatures.—Examine the prisons of the inquisition, hear the melancholy notes sounded in every cell.—Consider the anguish of mock-trials, and the exquisite tortures consequent thereupon, mercilessly inflicted upon the unfortunate, where the racked and weary soul has so often wished to take its leave,—but cruelly not suffered to depart.—Consider how many of these helpless wretches have been haled from thence in all periods of this tyrannic usurpation, to undergo the massacres and flames to which a false and a bloody religion has condemned them. (Sterne 1996: 100–101)

In Sancho's understanding of the sermon, the contemporary realm of the West Indies is implied in the general condemnation of slavery, and Sterne does not seem troubled by this (maybe generous) interpretation.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, he is happy to be associated with the progressive discourse on the abolition of the trade. Nonetheless, it remains debatable how much of this context is decipherable for Sterne's wider reading audience of the time that first and foremost craved more instalments of his most famous literary work.

*Tristram Shandy* is regarded as a metanarrative *tour de force* that displays Sterne's fondness of using any given cause to digress from his actual tale. There is no clear linear plot, the highly intrusive narrator Tristram is not even born in the first two volumes and describes his own conception, digressing to tell the story of his uncle Toby and his servant Corporal Trim, and ending the narrative again before his own birth.<sup>32</sup> The novel additionally includes black and blank pages and other typographic quirks. The mentioned "tender tale of the sorrows of a friendless poor negro-girl" appears as one of the many digressions in the final ninth volume (chapter six), interspersed notably by the famous over-use of the dash worth quoting at some length:

When Tom, an' please your honour, got to the shop, there was nobody in it, but a poor negro girl, with a bunch of white feathers slightly tied to the end of a long cane, flapping away flies—not killing them.—'Tis a pretty picture! said my uncle Toby—she had suffered persecution, Trim, and had learnt mercy—

—She was good, an' please your honour, from nature as well as from hardships; and there are circumstances in the story of that poor friendless slut that would melt a heart of stone, said Trim; and some dismal winter's



evening, when your honour is in the humour, they shall be told you with the rest of Tom's story, for it makes a part of it——

Then do not forget, Trim, said my uncle Toby.

A Negro has a soul? an' please your honour, said the Corporal (doubtingly).

I am not much versed, Corporal, quoth my uncle Toby, in things of that kind; but I suppose, God would not leave him without one, any more than thee or me——

——It would be putting one sadly over the head of another, quoth the Corporal.

It would so; said my uncle Toby. Why then, an' please your honour, is a black wench to be used worse than a white one?

I can give no reason, said my uncle Toby——

——Only, cried the Corporal, shaking his head, because she has no one to stand up for her——

——'Tis that very thing, Trim, quoth my uncle Toby,——which recommends her to protection——and her brethren with her; 'tis the fortune of war which has put the whip into our hands *now*——where it may be hereafter, heaven knows!——but be it where it will, the brave, Trim! will not use it unkindly.

——God forbid, said the Corporal.

Amen, responded my uncle Toby, laying his hand upon his heart. (TS 493)

This anecdote, part of Trim's account of his brother Tom's marriage to a Jew's widow in (Catholic) Lisbon, comes itself as an insertion into the (sentimental) plot of uncle Toby's pursuit of widow Watman.<sup>33</sup> Ellis proposes a metonymic relationship between the fly swat and the whip of West Indian slaveholders (1996: 74) and characterises this as a "classical sentimental scene: voyeuristically depicting the powerless reconciled to their powerlessness" (1996: 69). Woodard too emphasises the lacking agency of the non-white character here: "The 'Negro girl' in the sausage shop never speaks aloud in the scene with Toby and Trim, perhaps symbolizing the fact that only a white person could represent or validate the black woman, whether as narrative voice or as an individual" (1999: 81). The girl's apparent benevolence towards the fly is described as the result of her "nature" and the "hardships" she has suffered. The circumstances of her life which "would melt a heart of stone" however remain a lacuna in Trim's account, which, as Ramesh Mallipeddi contends (2016: 96), thereby actually evades addressing slavery. Sussman similarly notes that the "tender tale" "occupies only a page in Sterne's novel and has nothing much to do with the conditions of slaves in the British West Indies, [...] it is a very Sternian digression within a digression within a digression"

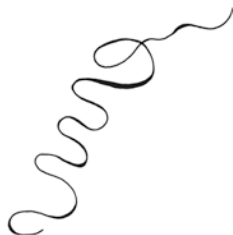
(2000: 145). The unpresented story of the “poor friendless slut” (not a derogatory term at that time) is so “heart-warming” it should be saved for a “dismal winter’s evening”.

Toby and Trim proceed to more general deliberations on the common debate of the day whether “A Negro has a soul”, suddenly switching to the male universal.<sup>34</sup> The next sentence, however, quickly reasserts the specificity of gender of the subject of the scene. Rather than claim equality in rights that a focus on men might have implied, Trim wonders why the “black wench” should “be used worse than a white one”. Women appear in need of protection, irrespective of “colour”. With the Treaty of Utrecht as the larger historical context here, the characters find themselves in a situation in which the British have gained the upper hand in the military rivalries with the Catholic South of Europe. Thus, the forced conversion of Jews<sup>35</sup> in Lisbon and the reference to the inquisition yet again give room to Sterne’s anti-Catholicism, which Mallipeddi reads as an overshadowing of the theme of slavery altogether. While I concur that this passage does not communicate radical abolitionist ideas, such as those voiced by Granville Sharp, I do believe in explicitly using the term “whip” in the course of the conversation, there remains a clear allusion to a British “polite” form of rule in the colonies. Toby is no longer just interested in the girl but “her brethren with her” which speaks to a larger context of suppression than just the individual woman’s unknown story. Since “the fortune of war [...] has put the whip into our hands *now*”, it is the obligation of the British to govern “fairly” and to demonstrate that they “will not use it unkindly”. Thus, while Sterne circumvents the realities of the slave trade in his digressive tale, Toby’s hand on his heart signposts a sentimental imagination of amelioration that would be the result of British (enlightened) and “just” administration (as opposed to the Catholic “barbarities”). So rather than assume the abolition of slavery, a “kinder”, sentimental rule is envisioned.

There is another pretext for the framing of this scene that concerns the concept of liberty not in relation to enslavement but regarding the role of unmarried men (cf. Ellis 1996: 68), making the reference to the sausages in the episode, framed by the voyeuristic attempts of Tristram’s parents to spy on Toby and Wadman after all, somewhat bawdy and sexually ambiguous. Reflecting on Tom’s imprisonment, Trim states:

Nothing, continued the Corporal, can be so sad as confinement for life—or so sweet, an’ please your honour, as liberty.

Nothing, Trim——said my uncle Toby, musing——  
 Whilst a man is free——cried the Corporal, giving a flourish with his  
 stick thus——



A thousand of my father's most subtle syllogisms could not have said  
 more for celibacy.

My uncle Toby look'd earnestly towards his cottage and his bowling  
 green. (TS 490–491)

Marriage and imprisonment are painted as analogous here and the elusive graphic representation of male (sexual) freedom in the Corporal's movement of the stick is a self-reflexive and playful way of adding to the text's continuous pleasurable deferral of narrative/sexual gratification. The sentimental affective address to the reader thus is not only tied to the debate about slavery and its amelioration but gender too seems highly relevant and I will discuss how masculinity for Sterne, in contrast to Sancho's more familial version, is linked to an imagination of freedom in bachelorhood and/or celibacy.

First, however, the question of Sterne's elusive representation of enslavement extends to a second much-discussed scene in the 1768 published *A Sentimental Journey* in the sections "The Passport" and "The Captive" in which a missing passport in France triggers a highly self-indulgent comparison of Yorick's misery to slavery that also echoes the wording of his sermon (cf. SJ 70). In Paris he hears an incarcerated bird sing: "a starling hung in a little cage.—'I can't get out,—I can't get out,' said the starling" (SJ 69).<sup>36</sup> Later Yorick again reflects on his constricted liberty of movement and the danger of coming under what he perceives as the despotic rule of the French monarch and a possible confinement in the Bastille if he were caught traveling without a passport while France and Great Britain are still fighting in the Seven Years' War. In his room, he closes his eyes to almost luxuriously wallow in his misery:

I sat down close to my table, and leaning my head upon my hand, I began to figure to myself the miseries of confinement. I was in a right frame for it, and so I gave full scope to my imagination.

I was going to begin with the millions of my fellow creatures born to no inheritance but slavery; but finding, however affecting the picture was, that I could not bring it near me, and that the multitude of sad groups in it did but distract me.— (SJ 70)

However affecting slavery is the imagination of the suffering multitude does not capture Yorick's full attention.<sup>37</sup> It is only when he focuses again on a fictional captive that the true power of sentimental empathy works, his "heart began to bleed" and later he "burst into tears" (SJ 71).<sup>38</sup> Ellis again stresses the figurative connection between the bird and the slave: "In much the same way as the slave owner's whip was translated into the fly swat of the woman slave in *Tristram Shandy*, the starling is made a metonymic emblem of African slavery" (1996: 74). Other critics, such as Laura Brown, read the reference to nonhuman beings as stand-ins or a "disguise" for non-Europeanness but arguing, ultimately similarly, that the bird becomes "an African slave in the new world" (Brown 2001: 253). In contrast, Mallipeddi fundamentally repudiates these metaphorical interpretations. He argues, "in these episodes, set in Catholic Portugal and absolutist France, the captives are not literally slaves but religious minorities, victims not of colonial slavery but of Catholic persecution; in other words, the specific contexts alluded to in these episodes obscure rather than illuminate the sociopolitical structures of slavery" (2016: 87) and he concludes, "even though the trope of slavery is employed in different contexts, the institution of slavery itself remains unrepresented in the novel" (2016: 106). Despite these conflicting interpretations that highlight either the metaphorical representation of slavery or its potential concealment, most critics, including Ellis and Mallipeddi, seem to agree on the limits of sentimentalism as a politically effective discourse that would genuinely challenge the British status quo of the time.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, rather than engage in more detail in the critical debate on whether there is a metaphorical/metonymical relationship between the "negro girl", the starling, and actual enslaved people in the West Indies, I want to examine how the digressive tonality links to my larger interest in (familial) feeling.

In both sentimental scenes from Sterne's texts it is not entirely clear what the desired effect on the readers is: are we to empathise with the

victims of injustice (the “negro girl” and the starling) or are we to indulge in the tearful display of affectionate feeling of Toby and Yorick? Or, are the readers invited to take on a much more critical distance to these thus potentially self-reflexive and mocking spectacles of literary sentimentalism that are embedded in more humorous and satirical contexts after all? How much reflexivity regarding the conventions of sentimentalism, especially when addressing such a controversially debated topic as slavery predating abolition, can be assumed of their contemporaries? Festa suggests that this is a problem of representation more generally connected to the mode of sentimentalism and the fabrication of supposedly authentic feeling in literary discourse (cf. 2006: 84). The figure of “the slave” is more important than the actual freedom of the enslaved, the bird is not set free but handed down like a cheap commodity (cf. 2006: 86–87).<sup>40</sup> The evocation of strong feelings is also a feature of (financial) success in the literary marketplace. The link between slavery and the trapped bird can thus serve not only to discuss the (limited) political effectivity of sentimentalism, it is also connected once more to the role of aesthetics and originality.

Both Ellis and Festa in their readings return to Hume’s parrot and his derisive comments on Black artists merely being capable of mindless repetition. Festa draws attention to the “I” in the statement of the bird which is contingent on the subjectivity of its human teacher, an English groom (cf. 2006: 84). Like Crusoe’s parrot, the starling after all can only repeat its master’s words. But like the parrot’s truncated exclamation “Robin Crusoe” that startles its master, the mimic discourse of the animal can have an emotive power of its own, as does the starling’s voice on Yorick. This question of affective valence becomes highly relevant regarding the creative agency of the disenfranchised, like Sancho, who did participate in literary discourse’s bargaining in feeling. Thomas Jefferson, who in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (written in 1781–1784, published first in 1787) doubts the artistic capacities of Black people, inserts within his abundant racist proclamations that “in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous” (2011 [1854]: 382). Unsurprisingly, he is dismissive of the poems of Phillis Wheatley, whom Sancho in turn praises for her “Genius in bondage”.<sup>41</sup> About Sancho, who, in comparison to Wheatley, “has approached nearer to merit in composition”, Jefferson states,

He is often happy in the turn of his compliments, and his style is easy and familiar, except when he offers a Shandean fabrication of words. But his imagination is wild and extravagant, escapes incessantly from every restraint

of reason and taste, and, in the course of its vagaries, leaves a tract of thought as incoherent and eccentric, as is the course of a meteor through the sky. (2011 [1854]: 383)

Sentimentalism is considered an objectionable literary style, especially for an African whose capabilities, while outstanding for a *Black* writer, could never match the excellence of the white “epistolary class” (Jefferson 2011 [1854]: 384). Is the problem then that Sancho (mindlessly) imitates “white” conventions or that he adopts the repulsive habit of the “Shandean fabrication of words” that is “incoherent and eccentric”? Is the critique directed at content or form? In other words, is Sancho with his “familiar” style lacking creativity or, like Sterne, too “wild” in his “meteoric” imagination?<sup>42</sup>

As a way to repudiate the framework of imitation, Ellis (cf. 1996: 75) cites Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial concept of mimicry, to describe Sancho’s relationship to Englishness. Discussing British rule over India, Bhabha had famously argued that “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (1994: 123). By repeating conventions of sentimentality, Ellis analogously argues, Sancho also threatens English dominance. However, this framing is still somewhat lacking. Sancho is either dismissed as imitative or elevated as a subversive mimic man in Bhabha’s sense, adopting a literary style to undermine colonial power. I want to maintain that neither of these labels describes the literary ambition of Sancho’s letters, which are entangled in the discourses of playful sentimentalism and genuine affective individualism, adequately. His writing in the most literal sense of entanglement is part of the metropolitan discourses of its day (and not a postcolonial writing back or mimicry before its time). As much as Sancho is adopting British writing conventions, the very aesthetics of sentimentalism is already in its emergence deeply entangled with Britain’s role in the slave economy. Bhabha’s concept of mimicry therefore runs the risk of always prioritising colonial discourse and emphasising a postcolonial response or ambivalent and subversive rewriting when, in fact, I would stress the contemporaneous links. In framing Sterne and Sancho as entangled literary voices, we can understand the references to slavery as signposts of a hegemonic sentimental and supposedly benevolent British identity. Sterne needs objects of tearful displays of compassion to demonstrate elevated feeling. As in the Hegelian conception of intersubjective relationality, the master needs the slave.<sup>43</sup> But Sancho, too, claims a position of “masterful” sentimentality—he, too, pities the enslaved in a Sternian vocabulary. In his complicated

familiarity with his objects of pity, however, his digressions truly interrupt the all too neat narrative of the sovereign modern subject.

Sukhdev Sandhu, in a very convincing reading of the relationship between Sterne and Sancho, stresses Sancho's agency in appropriating Sterne's digressive literary style as well (cf. also Innes 2002: 33). Despite the pro-slavery argument that slaves cannot draw a straight line, that is to say, "think straight", Sancho does not adopt a more polished linear prose (cf. Sandhu 1998: 100–101). He self-consciously litters his letters with Sternian dashes, interrupting the literary flow, often expressing strong feelings and emotional upheaval in these parentheses and digressions.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, an eighteenth-century claim to subjectivity comprises the capacity to think *and* feel. Sandhu argues:

In contrast to this supposed silencing of peripheral voices, we are now led to believe and rejoice in the fact that the Empire is apparently "writing back." The vengeful antagonism of this phrase is, as Sancho's life and letters prove, a misleading and reductive characterization [...]. For Sancho was actively encouraged, patronized, and financially assisted by many authors and artists right at the heart of the imperial metropolis, right in the very middle of the age of slavery. This did not mean he became a parrot, someone mindlessly aping the style and syllabics of authors whose prestige overawed him. No, of his own accord he selected the writer who meant most to him, consciously picked out which aspects of his aesthetics he felt were most pertinent to his own life and concerns, and deployed them in various touching, adroit, and satirical ways. The empire does not—and did not—always write *back* to the center. Often, it writes in critical and reflective partnership *with* the center. (1998: 101–102)

I believe Sandhu is right to radicalise our understanding of why a Black author like Sancho could become part of British sentimentalism already during the eighteenth century. This is more than mimicking hegemonic Englishness, it is a digression from and an interruption of the supposed linearity of white superiority (and the rise of the novel framework), that is, as Sandhu cogently asserts, too often framed as challenged only ever retrospectively.

Accordingly, instead of debating the (in my opinion limited) counter-hegemonic weight of Sterne's contribution to anti-slavery thought or Sancho's status as a mimic man, I want to follow Sandhu's example to think more formally about how their digressive tonalities affect an understanding of subjectivity and familial feeling. This concerns primarily

temporality in relation to the seriality of the novel and the typographic peculiarities, but also the “time of heterosexuality” and the expectations of the order/progress of a man’s life. On the one hand, the discussed sentimental scenes in Sancho and Sterne could be seen as complacent and sentimental insertions only. On the other hand, digression, according to Schwalm, for instance, can be understood as pointing to the limits of the genre of autobiography to capture a life in writing (cf. 2007: 287–289). Read in this way, the digressive mode is not simply a signifier of the limited political weight of sentimentalism, it also interrupts more teleological narratives of coherent (modern) subjectivity and provides pause.

The narrator Tristram asserts the value of interrupting narrative flow and proclaims a necessary “masterstroke of digressive skill”:

For in this long digression which I was accidentally led into, as in all my digressions (one only excepted) there is a masterstroke of digressive skill, the merit of which has all along, I fear, been overlooked by my reader, - not for want of penetration in him, - but because 'tis an excellence seldom looked for, or expected indeed, in a digression; - and it is this: That tho' my digressions are all fair, as you observe, - and that I fly off from what I am about, as far and as often too as any writer in *Great-Britain*; yet I constantly take care to order affairs so, that my main business does not stand still in my absence.

I was just going, for example, to have given you the great out-lines of my uncle *Toby's* most whimsical character; - when my aunt *Dinah* and the coachman came a-cross us, and led us a vagary some millions of miles into the very heart of the planetary system: Notwithstanding all this, you perceive that the drawing of my uncle *Toby's* character went on gently all the time; - not the great contours of it, - that was impossible, - but some familiar strokes and faint designations of it, were here and there touch'd in, as we went along, so that you are much better acquainted with my uncle *Toby* now than you was before.

By this contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, - and at the same time. (TS 57–58)

Elaborate characterisation requires digressive description for the reader to get truly acquainted with the protagonists. Plot and characterisation are part of the narrative “machinery” that is “digressive” and “progressive” “at the same time”. This obviously will have an impact on how temporality



is expressed in the text as narrated time and narrative order. The universe of *Tristram Shandy* is not invested in a realistic description of empirical details that are causally motivated, as is the case in *Robinson Crusoe*. Mullan characterises this as a temporal distancing technique which is contrasted to Richardson's "truth of feeling" that draws the reader closer to the moment. In contrast, "*Tristram Shandy* is writing away from the moment" (2002: 160). Flint, in turn, emphasises that the direct narrative comment is writing "to" (rather than away from) the moment. Despite the assumed opposite directionality, both critics agree that Sterne's text as a result lacks "temporal intimacy". Flint writes, "Unlike Defoe's autobiographical narrators or Richardson's epistolary subjects, Sterne, for all his apparent writing to the moment, never really tries to flesh out the temporal intimacy between one's self and one's pen" (1998: 272). So, whether we understand the digressive "over-characterisation" as getting closer to (or stuck in?) the moment or the many prolepses and analepses as moving away from the moment, Sterne's digressive style certainly does not add to psychological proximity but draws attention to the artificiality of the process of trying to put a life into words.<sup>45</sup>

Writing and reading seem inextricably linked in this process.<sup>46</sup> Sterne, via Tristram's narration, reflects on the fact that he would need to "live faster" to produce adequate textual documentation:

I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume—and no farther than to my first day's life—'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it—on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back—was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this—And why not?—and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description—And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should just live 364 times faster than I should write—It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write—and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read. (TS 228)

Reading and writing become means in and of themselves, which is of course also a comment on the pleasure of producing and consuming fiction.

Visually the digressive tonality is characterised by the mentioned excessive use of the dash (of various lengths)<sup>47</sup> to insert ever more subplots and ideas, and Schwalm (2007: 289) links this once more to a formal repudiation of coherence and narrative linearity. Analysing the typeset in more detail, Lennard notes that paradoxically the digressive style is both satirical and yet potentially psychologically more “realistic” (yet not necessarily affectively intimate) than the pretence of ordered narrative.<sup>48</sup>

Digressions operate at all levels in *Tristram Shandy*, including those of the chapter and the volume, but they are manifest in the dashes and lunulae which spatter each page of text. At all levels digressions may, and often do, carry a satirical charge, but they also express, in the degree and scope of the disorganization which they impose, Tristram’s mind and psychology. (Lennard 1991: 140)

Thus, while parenthesis might be more lifelike, in the sense that it imitates how humans actually think and speak, it does add further challenge in relation to the representation of authentic feeling and affective proximity, as explained. This stylistic choice can thus be read as part of the satirical rather than sentimental register of Sterne that also creates emphasis. Lennard argues, “in satire the parenthesis is often not a digression but an intensification” (1991: 155). While for the novelist Sterne the dash seems to function as a satirical and self-reflexive distancing technique, for Sancho the letter writer, it is often used to imply greater proximity to his addressees, mimicking the spontaneous flow of actual conversation, creating a more familiar tonality that implies confidentiality, in inserting ever more little afterthoughts.

Moving away from the dash on the page, one can also link digression or temporal distance to the larger scope of the different volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. Publication in instalments gives Sterne the opportunity to react to trends and readers. Thomas Keymer sees a shift towards the more fashionable tone of sentimentalism only in the course of the publication of the later volumes. He argues, “*Tristram Shandy* was always potentially responsive to market conditions, which, with characteristic self-consciousness, it inscribes within itself” (Keymer 2005: 594). The serialised novel in that sense shares much with the interactive communication of letters. It is not a closed “masterpiece” but a dialogic form in the truest sense—especially if we consider the possibility that Sancho might very well have been an influence on Sterne’s decision to include the “tender tale”.

But despite his flirtation with literary trends, Sterne's writing of course does not simply reproduce the already slightly mocked conventions of tear-jerking sentimentalism straightforwardly but in his digressive tonality combines humour and sentiment. Thus, in contrast to a solely satirical understanding of digression, Sandhu reads Sterne's style in his fictional writing and in his sermon on philanthropy as a sincere call to pause and reflect.<sup>49</sup> "Linearity, Sterne believed, is tantamount to selfishness" (2001: 14). (Auto)Biography that focuses only on one life could be regarded as vain and thus *Tristram Shandy* is not as solipsistic as *Robinson Crusoe* one might argue. In this way, Sterne, like Sancho, intervenes in the modern romance with coherent (narrative) subjectivity. However, whether this can be equated with a more fundamental unsettling of hegemonic meaning-making seems dubious. Keymer, in contrast to Sandhu posits, "[i]n practice, the novel fails, or refuses, to sustain any clear distinction between sentimental sincerity and Shandean satire" (2005: 596). But is it not exactly this ambivalence of the novel that adds to the popularity of the medium in its serialised form?

Precisely because of its self-reflexivity it also addresses a diverse public sphere. Thus, it is probably not the right question to ask whether Sterne's sentimental philanthropy is sincere or whether his digressive and elusive style is (only) sardonic. His texts might well be so successful exactly because they combine both affective registers. Keymer himself states, "Always alert to the diversity of readerships and the multiplicity of meanings, Sterne offers his audience a text in which sentimental tastes are simultaneously fed and mocked" (2005: 597–598). The preacher Sterne uses sentimentalism ambivalently, as a means to deride and indulge a growing feeling middle-class reading audience. Sancho's letters in contrast contest the distribution of object and subject of sentimentality more fundamentally. He needs to generate true affection in his readers, upon whom he also depends financially, and this also finally relates to questions of *familial* feeling in Sterne and Sancho's texts. Both employ a digressive tonality that avoids clear-cut politics in favour of feeling, feeling that in Sterne circumvents heterosexuality (via misogyny) while in Sancho, emotionality is linked to a romanticisation of the nuclear family of his Sanchonettas. In this context, both reproduce the specifically gendered figure of the man of feeling which comes not only with gender but also class privileges after all.

Robert Markley is highly critical of the idealisation of men of feeling since it leaves no room for the agency of victims of social inequality,

especially women and children. He writes, “This strategy of rendering the victims of sentimental ideology as politically and symbolically impotent becomes a crucial means of mystifying the class prejudices and ideological imperatives that underlie the workings of sensibility” (1987: 212). It is mainly the travelling upper class that seems to evade the responsibilities of a “caring” masculinity. In her reading of *A Sentimental Journey* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes the blatant “absence from the novel of any shred of a literal family for Yorick” (1985: 81). As the visual representation of Trim’s flourish of the stick showed, marriage is considered anathema to liberty and the sphere of control and policing of male sexuality. The narrative pleasure in digressing literally also pertains to a deferral of (male) obligations. While Defoe’s adventurous Crusoe seems devoid of any sexual or domestic desire, Yorick’s sentimentalism points in the direction of the libertine. In *Tristram Shandy*, which Nussbaum calls “Sterne’s anti-didactic novel of masculine domesticity” (2003: 89), “women ironically seem irrelevant to a story that begins with sexual congress and childbirth” (2003: 100). Nussbaum compares conversation in *Tristram Shandy* to *coitus interruptus* and essentially “phallic humour”: The book “engages long-suffering readers in the playful combat of unfinished conversation, constantly interrupted for apparently frivolous reason, and it fails to culminate in a union of either bodies or minds” (2003: 101).<sup>50</sup> Tristram despite his best efforts cannot control his relations and the gendered order of the family: “the family becomes not an ideal of governance but a symbol of social entanglement” (Flint 1998: 288). Respectful masculinity would need to be distinguished from aristocratic foppery, as Sancho demands of his friend Soubise. Sterne’s novel, however, seems to at least flirt with a more libertine version of masculinity as in the many episodes surrounding Toby’s glorified military past and questionable virility.

With its repeated allusions to impotence, be it uncle Toby’s war wound in the groin or Tristram’s accidental circumcision, Sterne’s writing “does not just indulge in improprieties, it mocks the reader who might be determined not to find them” (Mullan 2002: 187). Against the decorum of sentimental fiction, Sterne establishes a double-voicedness of literary discourse that the initiated reader might decode. When Sancho, in a letter to Meheux writes tongue in cheek, “You see I write like a lady, from one corner of the paper to the other” (LIS 96), he seems closest to Sterne’s satirical tone. Here Sancho, too, demonstrates his awareness of gendered assumptions around the culture of taste and letters. But in contrast to Sterne’s heroes’ attempts to escape matrimony, the family remains the

topos of belonging in Sancho's letters. Sancho, the proud Black father and husband, thus in fact already points more in the direction of the realistic affective individualism of Austen (although he never talks about the marriage prospects of his Black daughters in Britain), in comparison to the parson Sterne for whom the family seems cumbersome, both in fiction and real life. As has become clear, style and feeling are highly ambivalent in both authors with Sancho often more enthusiastically embracing family/familiarity, while Sterne seems content to defer both political and familial responsibility. For Sancho, the position of a refined man of letters rested to no small degree on his "authentic" emotionality, writing about his role as a loving husband and father. The community of his family and correspondents is an important affective resource, while for Sterne the demands of family seem limiting. In his playful texts an extroverted, at times fop-pish, masculinity seeks to circumvent heterosexuality altogether.

Sancho needs to establish his "dashing familiarity" as a real person, while Sterne seems flattered and strategically uses the inclusion of the Sancho letter to the benefit of his reputation, eluding solidarity as a true concern for Others' well-being. Nevertheless, the ultimate tension between the display of lachrymose emotions as authentic political commitment or the lack thereof in relation to both their fleeting comments on enslavement cannot be settled once and for all. Consequently, rather than ask whether Sancho is mimicking Sterne or Sterne is appropriating Black suffering, they should be understood as entangled in their adoption of a digressive tonality that is not afraid to divagate, pushing the boundaries of sentimentality. While Sterne disrupts the linearity of the novel form and challenges generic restrictions, Sancho's bold adoption of an "affected" literary style demonstrates a Black interest in aestheticised prose despite the fact that this might weaken his claim to rational subjectivity.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the ideal of the domestic family becomes even more central—both for marginalised and canonical literary voices—in the further generic consolidation of the bourgeois novel, which is also increasingly shaped by more resistant, less digressive, tones. Austen's heroines cannot conveniently go on a *grand tour* to escape the confines of domesticity and Wedderburn, born on a Caribbean plantation, also cannot use slavery as simply a sentimental interlude.

## NOTES

1. Carey (2005) provides close readings of the ameliorationist passages in Scott's *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1996 [1766]) and Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigné* (1777).
2. In the following, quotes from the primary sources *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (Sancho 1998 [1782]), *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Sterne 1998 [1759–1767]), and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick* (Sterne 2005 [1768]) will be abbreviated as LIS, TS, and SJ respectively in all in-text citations.
3. Crewe claims that the letters were purely private and not meant to be published and that she had assembled them posthumously to demonstrate that “an untutored African may possess abilities equal to an [sic] European” (LIS 4). Carey discusses Crewe's editorial statement which, he argues, negates “Sancho's editorial contribution, while also attempting to disguise the extent of her own intervention” (2005: 62). He also suggests that Sancho must have kept copies of some of the letters, possibly with intent of publication (cf. Carey 2004: 88).
4. Montagu also funded the Cambridge education of the Jamaican poet Francis Williams (whose accomplishments Hume mocked in the mentioned infamous footnote). John Montagu (1690–1749) was also a distant relative of the famous Bluestocking salonnière Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800) (sister of Sarah Scott [1723–1795], author of the sentimental abolitionist novel *The History of Sir George Ellison* which Sancho praises in his letter to Sterne). What is more, Elizabeth Montagu was a cousin of Laurence Sterne's wife, Elizabeth Lumley, and, like Sancho, corresponded directly with Sterne. Quite literally then the influential Montagu family in many ways represents the entanglements between literary discourse, familial, and national belonging. In addition to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (whose husband Edward Wortley Montagu was the cousin of Elizabeth Montagu's husband Edward), author of the well-known (and orientalist) *Embassy Letters* (cf. Montagu 1997), the Montagu family was related directly or by marriage to authors such as Samuel Pepys, Henry Fielding, and Laurence Sterne. Therefore, the interaction of early Black writers like Sancho and Williams with this aristocratic family is crucial for the fact that their legacy has survived to this day.
5. One reason for this was, of course, that there were substantially fewer women in London's early Black community and in contrast to the United States, where later so-called miscegenation laws made intermarriage illegal up until 1967, many Black men in Britain did marry (often working-class) white women. Sandiford explains that there was a widely held misconception

- that marriage (and/or baptism) would grant Black people automatic freedom in Britain (cf. 1988: 26–27).
6. The 1766 exchange of letters is published in Sterne's letters in 1775 and once more in Sancho's first volume of letters in 1782.
  7. As suffrage at this time is not tied to the place of birth (or race), but gender and property status, Sancho is mentioned prominently as making history as the first Black voter in an educational pack published by the British government. This can be read once more as part of the attempt to establish a "happy" multicultural British archive of the past, as I will discuss in the conclusion. Cf. [http://www.parliament.uk/documents/education/online-resources/printed-resources/KS5\\_Find\\_Your\\_Way\\_resource.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/documents/education/online-resources/printed-resources/KS5_Find_Your_Way_resource.pdf) (accessed 28 May 2014). Ellis (1996: 59), too, criticises this overemphasis of biography over literary text.
  8. Gilroy references the story of Margaret Garner, which Toni Morrison, of course, impressively transferred into the novel *Beloved* (1987).
  9. Carretta writes: "This interest in the evidence of a Black man of feeling was very great at a time when advocates of slavery often contended that Blacks were incapable of the moral refinement allegedly displayed by Whites" (in LIS xvii).
  10. Sören Hammerschmidt argues that the publication and reception of Sancho's letter in the context of abolition in fact obstruct an understanding of his "epistemological multiplicity" (2008: 270).
  11. Caryl Phillips protests such labelling: "To view this family man as an 'Uncle Tom' is to misread both the historical period and the nature of the man" (in King et al. 1997: 12). However, he concedes that "Sancho was the forerunner of the possibility of thinking about black people in assimilationist terms. He was a 'good' black" (in King et al. 1997: 13) and Ellis, too, states: "Sancho represents, as many have pointed out, the most complete assimilation of an African writer into British culture in the period" (1996: 59). However, Rice similarly castigates Equiano for his "hoped-for assimilation to bourgeois English respectability" (2012: 161) and contrasts him to the more radical Robert Wedderburn. So instead of trying to come to an appraisal of the Black authors' degree of radicalness or assimilation, like Ellis, I think it is helpful to pay closer attention to the different aesthetic projects of the narratives of these writers rather than determine their supposedly either subversive or transgressive politics. For a more comprehensive overview of the "assimilation debate" that goes back to Paul Edwards's introduction to the 1968 edition of Sancho's letters and Edwards (1985), cf. Carey (2004).
  12. Johnson and Molineux offer a discussion of two tobacco wrappers for brands that Sancho sold in his shop featuring anti-French iconography and

- argue that “these trade advertisements extend the material trace of his patriotic sensibilities” (2018: 88).
13. Sancho also passes on newspaper clippings to Spink which suggest that the riot might have been a plot by the French and Americans to weaken the British economy and thus their war efforts but is not entirely convinced by this theory (LIS 225–226).
  14. *The European Magazine*, and *London Review*. vol. 2 (September 1782): 199. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101065086322&view=1up&seq=217> (accessed 6 June 2019).
  15. Cf. “My best half and Sanchonetta’s are all well” (LIS 51). He calls his wife “Dame Sancho” (LIS 36), “the treasure of my soul” (LIS 42) and admits “I can compare [her] to nothing so properly as to a diamond in the dirt” (LIS 57). He continually emphasises his love for his wife: “I am not ashamed to own that I love my wife—I hope to see you married, and as foolish” (LIS 48).
  16. The rivalries between the inclusion of Christian Black British subjects and the simultaneous renunciation of Orientalised Others in Asia following the Indian Rebellion in 1857 will be explored in relation to later Victorian authors Seacole and Dickens.
  17. Innes argues that since Sancho has no knowledge about his past, he is free to reinvent himself and reads this as an adoption of the Shandean challenge of meaning and delight in the grotesque (2002: 25, 28). While Sancho’s style is certainly playful, I do not think this necessarily amounts to such a high degree of freedom/mobility in relation to Sancho’s social position.
  18. Sancho characterises his position in England (perhaps in playful modesty) as that of “only a lodger and hardly that” (LIS 177). Here the conventions of sentimental emphatic display of both modesty and gratefulness need to be related to Sancho’s complicated positionality: “In making the complexities of sentimental gratification his own, Sancho claims an equality of sophistication with his correspondents, even in the act of acknowledging their social and financial superiority to him. Furthermore, his resistance to, and his discomfort with, expressions of gratitude, while playful in tone, show a recognition that gratitude—when unrestricted, taken to the extreme—can imply submission and inferiority” (Boulukos 2008: 177).
  19. In yet a different letter, Sancho again contemplates, “It is the most puzzling affair in nature, to a mind that labours under obligations, to know how to express its feelings” (LIS 50). For Sancho, the question of the representation of emotions in writing is a recurring concern, not only to prove his status as a feeling subject but also his aesthetic sensibilities as a letter writer. He is also quite aware of the difference between sentimental suffering via the reception of the pain of others and of being actually unwell. Sancho constantly addresses his physical unease from the gout as in



the following quote in which he describes his own and his wife's bad health—albeit in his characteristic humorous tone: “my better self has been but poorly for some time—she groans with the rheumatism—and I grunt with the gout—a pretty concert!—Life is thick-sown with troubles—and we have no right to exemption.—The children, thank God! are well [...]” (LIS 54). In another letter, after having expressed his own discomfort once more, he utters the following good wishes to a friend: “May you know no pains but of sensibility!” (LIS 63). Sancho thus mockingly contrasts the sentimental expression of refined emotionality that, in fact, can be quite pleasurable and the actual debilitating experience of constant bodily pain.

20. Sancho allegedly had unsuccessfully wanted to play both literary figures in stage productions (cf. Jekyll in LIS 7) and in a letter to Mr M[cheux] in one of the many parentheses on the status of “Blackamoors”, writes jokingly, “from Othello to Sancho the big—we are either foolish—or mulish” (LIS 180).
21. Here we see a contrast between Sancho, who, as mentioned, often talks about his daily routines and his domestic bliss, and Equiano, who, out of courtesy to the sexual politics of the time, mentions his white wife in one sentence only, focusing more exclusively on his abolitionist mission. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, Equiano's *Narrative* follows the conventions of the Puritan spiritual autobiography. His modernity is expressed in positioning himself in relation to Godly providence. Sancho instead displays modes of affective relationality as familial feeling.
22. Christine Levecq argues that “Sancho places his republican aesthetics within his racially, socially, and culturally constantly shifting discourse, exemplifying a radicalization of the British balancing act between freedom and the common good” (2008: 83).
23. This letter is misdated by ten years to July 1776 (LIS 73, cf. Descargues 1991: 153). Ellis offers comment on the problematic dating of letters by editor Crewe (cf. 1996: 59).
24. Cf. the appendix in LIS (331) for an overview of the alterations that Sterne seems to have completed with publication in mind.
25. Thus, understanding Sterne simply as Sancho's “ultimate benefactor”, as Woodard phrases it (1999: 91), does not pay enough attention to the reciprocal interest in endorsement.
26. Sterne was not the only one interested in publishing his correspondence with Sancho. Quaker Edmund Rack writes to Sancho asking permission to include two of Sancho's letters in a publication that seems not to have gone into print after all. The authentication of Black voices appeared especially valuable for the abolitionists and Rack assures Sancho, “the sentiments they contain do thee great honour; and, if published, may convince some proud Europeans, that the noblest gifts of God, those of the mind, are not

confined to any nation or people [...]. Be assured, my friend, that I *feel* the regard I *profess*: and should rejoice were it in my power to put an end to the slavery, or lessen the misery, of *one* of thy poor countrymen” (in LIS 301). In this letter, as elsewhere, the sentimental hyperbolic tone does not distinguish much between the affective effect of lessening the ills of slavery for one or for many.

27. In another letter, Sterne asks Sancho to remind the Montagus of their subscription money, thus also demonstrating a more banal financial interest in the connection to Sancho/the Montagu family (cf. LIS 334–335; Sandhu 2001: 13).
28. This can also be understood as an endorsement of monogenesis as opposed to those pro-slavery writings that supported polygenesis based on the idea of the great chain of being and separate “human races/species”, as explained in the introduction.
29. After all, the eventual bill for the abolition of slavery in 1833 only passed once a tax-financed substantial compensation for the financial losses of slave *owners* was granted. The enslaved obviously were never considered as potential claimants or deserving of reparations in this equation. Cf. the online Encyclopaedia of British Slave-ownership hosted by the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership which has been established at the University College London: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/> (accessed 17 July 2019).
30. The name Yorick is of course also Sterne’s intertextual borrowing from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* ([1600] in Shakespeare 1998) with “the gravediggers-scene in the fifth act” explicitly referenced in *A Sentimental Journey* (SJ 82).
31. Mallipeddi highlights that early abolitionists and contemporaries of Sterne did draw parallels between the inquisition and the West Indian economy more explicitly: “Whereas Sterne uses slavery as a trope to condemn the Inquisition, Sharp uses the Inquisition as a trope to condemn slavery” (2016: 108).
32. Schwalm discusses the parody of autobiographic conventions such as the late and absurd dedication as well as the ignorance of conventionalised declarations of modesty and calls *Tristram Shandy* a metabiography (2007: 283–284).
33. Ellis also stresses the layered complexity of the scene, which he describes as “a digression (the story of the ‘negro girl’), within a digression (the story of Tom), within a digression (uncle Toby’s amours)” (1996: 69).
34. Ellis calls this a “slip of the pen” (1996: 70) that could be connected to Sancho as an original source of inspiration for the episode after all.
35. While Ellis reads Tom’s fate of ending up before the inquisition as a result of him and the widow putting pork *into* the sausage, Mallipeddi interprets this as the widow’s secret holding on to Jewish kosher food and therefore

not including pork in the sausage (as the Portuguese Catholics would), which I would agree with given the phrasing “that they had *but* put pork into their sausages, the honest soul had never been [...] dragg’d to the inquisition” (TS 490, emphasis added).

36. I discuss the reference to this line in Austen’s *Mansfield Park* in Chap. 4.
37. Markley reads the inability to sympathise with more than an individual specifically in terms of class privilege connected to fears around social instability and contestations of hereditary nobility (cf. 1987: 226).
38. Marcus Wood speaks of the “solipsistic base of Sentimentalism” (2002: 14) and the “auto-erotics of empathy” (2002: 16) (unfortunately, he does not engage in any detail with Sancho’s text which is once more reduced to an imitation of Sterne). Thus, the setting of a solitary shedding of bodily fluids could, of course, also more satirically and ambiguously be associated with masturbation in this scene.
39. In contrast, to the generally critical reception of a sentimental abolitionism, Mullan argues Sterne’s text “is not necessarily narcissistic and indulgent; it confesses itself to be inventive and purposeful: a necessary fiction” (2002: 194). Rather than simply proclaim sympathy as progressive, the startling episode, according to him, in fact alludes to the limits of such a “global panacea” that more often than not, is self-serving. Mullan continues, “the text is mawkish here, certainly—although progressive on the question of slavery by the standards of Sterne’s culture—but it is subtle about its own indulgence. It admits itself powerless to imagine benevolence as a general standard or experience it in a pressing and immediate form” (2002: 194). With Mallipeddi (2016) and compared to other abolitionist voices of the time, I find the assessment of Sterne as “progressive” by the “standards of [...] [his] culture” not very convincing but will say more about the aesthetic (rather than political) ambivalences of the digressive tonality in Sterne (and Sancho).
40. Festa also argues that the sentimental style functions as an aesthetic counter concept to the emphasis on economic value that Defoe’s and Equiano’s writing embodies. It is the idiosyncratic attachment to objects and private feelings that are characteristic of both Sterne and Sancho (cf. Festa 2006: 67). Lynch (2000), too, highlights the (capitalist) modernity of sentimental fiction in its many scenes of exchange of money/keepsakes.
41. Remarkably, Sancho thus not only claims the position of literary author, he is also (probably the first) Black literary critic of other Black writing. The section reads: “Phyllis’s poems do credit to nature—and put art—merely as art—to the blush.—It reflects nothing either to the glory or generosity of her master—if she is still his slave—except he glories in the *low vanity* of having in his wanton power a mind animated by Heaven—a genius superior to himself—the list of splendid—titled—learned names, in confirma-

tion of her being the real authoress.—alas! shews how very poor the acquisition of wealth and knowledge are—without generosity—feeling—and humanity.—These good great folks—all know—and perhaps admired—nay, praised Genius in bondage—” (LIS 112).

42. In this context, it is important to remember that “originality” is mainly a Romantic ideal and generous borrowings from other sources that would verge on plagiarism are not at all atypical for the emerging novel and publishing industry in general. Sterne himself was accused of plagiarism (most notably in a passage that, perhaps in an intentionally ironic fashion, denounces plagiarism) (cf. Randall 2001: 143). Many abolitionist publications, including that of Wedderburn (and Dickens’s *American Notes*), incorporated earlier texts without acknowledging their sources.
43. As explained in the introduction, following Gilroy’s critique of this very allegory, there is always the potential of subversive agency (albeit radically limited under the confines of the dehumanisation of enslavement).
44. Ellis speaks of Sancho’s “adoption of the dashing style” (1996: 82), Woodard calls it “his copious imitation of the Sternian style” (1999: 74) and Carey characterises Sancho’s writing as “playfulness expressed through light satire, gentle humour, and a pervading delight in verbal and typographical witticisms” (2005: 61). Hammerschmidt, who speaks of “the heterogeneity of Sancho’s epistolary self-portrait”, reads the dash in Sancho as a marker of “change in tone” or the demarcation between different personae (2008: 260): “In using the dash, Sancho avoids giving his reader notice of the impending change in tone, and thus manages to make his comic turn, his shift in narrative tone, all the more surprising. Sancho also makes use of the dash to render multiple characters in dialogue with each other and thereby achieve a dramatic effect in his letters” (2008: 265). I would see the differences in tone not so much in relation to the dash but the different addressees of his letters. It is especially in the letters to Meheux (LIS 96–99, 165) that the typographical borrowings from Sterne produce a more playful and satirical tone that is not found in the majority of the other letters (cf. Innes 2002: 25). In addition to the dash, Descargues (1991: 154) mentions the use of the “Shandean blot” when Sancho writes to Meheux, “my pen, like a drunkard, sucks up more liquor than it can carry, and so of course disgorges it at random” (LIS 165). While Descargues states, “Blots probably warrant spontaneity, this so-called intrinsic quality of conversational writing” (1991: 158), Mark Alan Mattes argues that the blot can also be associated with social criticism: “By representing himself as a penman’s devil—his indelible blackness haunting his manuscript, confounding his ink, pretending to mask the insurrectionary force of intelligence and wit found in his nonsense language—Sancho

- remade the impoverished physical and economic conditions of the blot's occurrence into the content of his social criticism" (2013: 589).
45. Judith Hawley distinguishes "logical narrative purpose" and "aesthetic purpose" to smooth transitions between scenes and chapters. Moreover, characters like Trim and Toby add their own digressions to Tristram's narrative in their embedded stories, as in the "tender tale" (2011: 22).
  46. And as is well-known, Sterne boasted: "I wrote not to be *fed*, but to be *famous*" (quoted in Ross's introduction in TS vii). Thus, the growing public sphere also gives rise to literary celebrity.
  47. Bandry emphasises the playfulness of the dash in Sterne as the presence of the narrator in the text (1988: 148).
  48. Additionally, the "messy" punctuation is also connected to the not yet conventionalised form of demarking narrative from direct and indirect speech that is established only in the more mimetic conventionality of rendering dialogue in the Victorian novel (cf. Lennard 1991: 144–145).
  49. In contrast to the mocked traveller Smelfungus in *A Sentimental Journey*, who was likely meant as a caricature of Tobias Smollet, the truly sentimental traveller (but also the philanthropist Christian) needs to slow down to engage with the environment and people.
  50. Nussbaum also links the "novel's impotence" (2003: 104) to the larger Shandy family history that is "intertwined with that of England and Ireland" (2003: 106). The familial decline parallels British history with the spectre of the always endangered nation.

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PART II

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1807–1857: Social Reform and the  
Rise of the New Imperialism



## CHAPTER 4

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# Resistances: Austen and Wedderburn

With the novel circulating more widely in the public sphere, there was growing concern that these texts could instil “dangerous” ideas in the minds of “impressionable” women and servants. Whereas eighteenth-century writing conventions foregrounded modesty and the display of piousness, the nineteenth century presents readers with more complex characters that are sometimes hardly sympathetic. In this chapter I juxtapose the most famous writer of (female) affective individualism, Jane Austen, and her canonical third published novel *Mansfield Park* that features her supposedly most unpopular heroine Fanny Price with orator Robert Wedderburn’s much more obscure pamphlet *The Horrors of Slavery*.<sup>1</sup> In their texts there is not as much thematic or generic overlap as in Defoe and Equiano and there is also no direct intertextuality as in Sancho and Sterne. Nevertheless, I suggest that by “entangling” their voices as well we get a better understanding of how writers used the affective means of prose writing to introduce more resistant tonalities of familial feeling. Austen presents wilful female subjectivity in a family that invested in slavery and Wedderburn the unruly planter son claims familiarity with both his enslaved mother and his slave-owning father, challenging the formula of the “horrors of slavery”. Via internal focalization and incendiary rhetoric respectively both texts tonally also create a more intimate familiarity with their readers. They thus aesthetically resist writing conventions and introduce more ambivalent nuance: pushing the limits of the genre of the country-house novel in Austen and refuting the demure

tone of abolitionist writing in Wedderburn. These aesthetic resistances are closely linked to the texts' discussions of the political status of women and free people of colour. Rather than rehash the analogy of women on the marriage market *as* slaves, I suggest an entangled perspective on how both authors use writing as a tool for resisting the interdependent rather than separate normative orders of gender and race which were being renegotiated on a global scale in the early nineteenth century.

This is a period of transitions both in international colonial and domestic familial terms. Following the 1807 abolition of the slave trade, the system and realities of slavery did not vanish overnight; and so, while there seems to be a general British public consensus in favour of gradual emancipation, the steps this might involve were controversial since there was justified widespread fear of insurgence in the Caribbean (cf. Perry 1994 for especial focus on Haiti; see also Lowe 2015: 23).<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the social shifts described in the introduction paved the way for the affective ideal of familial belonging which by now is engrained in the more established novel form that departs from conventionalised sentimentalism and centres on domesticity idealising bourgeois femininity. With growing fears about Britain's future standing in the colonies, the family is consolidated once more as the arena of social cohesion at home. Both *The Horrors of Slavery* and *Mansfield Park* mark a shift from the old plantation system based on British absentee planters and enslaved labour to an imperial reformation of British colonialism as a new form of imperial capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

By joining Austen and Wedderburn in this chapter, I thus want to question how familial feeling is played out as a governing principle that is paradoxically both increasingly normalised and contested in early nineteenth-century writing. No longer needing to establish individualism and the conventions of formal realism, as in Defoe, or, a claiming of subject status, as is Equiano, nor engaging in the witty conversation of sentimental men of letters, such as Sterne and Sancho, Austen and Wedderburn provide representations of family life that concern the everyday in Britain and its entanglements with settings abroad in the Caribbean. Both become chroniclers of affective responses to this new familiarity in writing (that also seems to invite more personal responses from readers), granted in very different formal registers. Wedderburn plagiarises formulaic abolitionist writing and at the same time, in true anarchical fashion, challenges the status quo of gendered and racialised familial hierarchies by demanding his inclusion into the realm of familial feeling, calling out his slave-owning Scottish father. Austen, in turn, introduces the introspection of

women on the “marriage market” in her famous style of free indirect discourse. This blurring of narrative perspective, wavering between the voice of the narrator and the focalization of the characters, has led to a vivid debate regarding her usage of irony and satire.<sup>4</sup> To be clear then, employing the term “resistances” to describe the tonality of these two authors’ texts is not meant as a straightforward political evaluation of their opinions regarding slavery or British imperialism. Rather, I read Austen and Wedderburn’s writing styles as introducing both aesthetic and thereby by extension, of course, also political, wedges into the family romance that are more ambivalent than the subversive versus conservative binary might suggest. In contrast to the idea of counterpoint, proposed by Edward Said in his landmark reading of Austen’s novel that I will revisit in this chapter, I want to use the lens of entangled histories to show that slavery was, in fact, quite central to the world of metropolitan polite discourse rather than the often-assumed taboo that delicate society could not mention. Such an entangled view also resists a clear-cut spatial binary of the colonies versus the metropole and links questions of class and the new imperial and gendered ordering of Britain’s affective make-up.

### THE WILL TO FEEL: JANE AUSTEN’S *MANSFIELD PARK*

Published in 1814, *Mansfield Park*’s plot either takes place directly preceding or following the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.<sup>5</sup> The novel recounts how class mobility coincides with a new form of familial emotionality and belonging.<sup>6</sup> Said rests his famous analysis of the text on the premise that in Austen’s “pre-imperialist novel” blood relation is no longer sufficient to uphold the continuity of familial heritage. What emerges instead is a “pattern of affiliation” (1994: 84–85). As is well-known, the imprudent choice of marriage that separates the three Ward sisters, who become Lady Bertram, Mrs Norris, and Mrs Price respectively, is the outset of this economic family drama. Mrs Price is forced by circumstance to appeal to her estranged sister and her rich husband.<sup>7</sup> Initially, she hopes to situate her oldest son on Sir Thomas’s West Indian property or even send him “to the East” (MP 7). The British system of primogeniture and the reliance on a “good match” for women gradually creates class discrepancies even within families—with the smaller nuclear family becoming the main pecuniary household unit. “Children of the same parents could be divided into different classes, and within a few generations, their connections to each other might be completely effaced” (Stewart 1993: 88). On

the one hand, women gain more say in their choice of spouse with the conception of marriage as based on affective ties and, on the other hand, it is specifically the lower gentry that comes under pressure to secure the financial means of their younger sons and daughters. Spinsters and bachelors who cannot find a suitable match enter the demeaning profession of the governess or try to bypass these financial limitations by emigrating to the colonies; and it is their plights that become the plots of popular nineteenth-century fiction.

In Austen's novel, the fate of upward-class mobility initially falls on the little girl Fanny instead of her brother William. Having no children herself and always acting in her own best financial interest, Mrs Norris appeals on her niece's behalf by asking Sir Thomas, "Is not she a sister's child" (MP 9), almost echoing the famous abolitionist slogan "Am I not A Man/Woman and a Brother/Sister". Deirdre Coleman (2009) understands this as satirising the very inequality that the supposed sibling bond between Black and white in abolitionist propaganda did not question. Rather than accepting Fanny into the family unconditionally, it is social etiquette and hierarchies that need stabilising. The introduction of the new uncouth family member is discussed as a risky endeavour, as it might not promise the refinement of the lower-class relation but the corruption of the four Bertram children. Given the age difference, however, Lady and Sir Bertram rest somewhat assured that their older children might withstand a potential erosion of manners (cf. MP 11).

On first meeting her, the ten-year-old plain Fanny does not immediately "disgust" (MP 13) the family. The social reform of a distant lower-class family member is described in terms of specific settings, most notably Mansfield Park itself. Fanny's feeling of being out of place is enhanced by the sheer size of the surroundings. "The grandeur of the house astonished but could not console her. The rooms were too large for her to move in with ease; whatever she touched she expected to injure, and she crept about in constant terror of something or other; often retreating towards her own chamber to cry" (MP 15). Overwhelmed by her new home and stunned by the demands of affective individualism that her class mobility entails, her lacking expression of the right kind of enthusiastic emotionality—"a wicked thing for her not to be happy"—is interpreted as sulkiness by Mrs Norris (MP 14). The heterodiegetic narrator, too, repeatedly comments on the discrepancy between expected feeling and Fanny's perceived ungratefulness. She only settles in once the younger son Edmund, who is planning to enter the clergy as was common for second-born sons,

becomes her friend. He also helps Fanny keep in touch with her other male confidante, her older brother William, who is invited to visit Mansfield Park before embarking on a career as a sailor.

With the death of Mr Norris and the poor returns from the Antiguan estate five years later (which corresponds to the actual decline of the sugar trade in Antigua at the time), there is some disruption in the familial framework. Fanny is transplanted from Mansfield Park to the new abode of Mrs Norris, and Sir Thomas is obliged to travel abroad together with his eldest and wasteful son, Tom, leading to their subsequent absence of two years. The financial and family difficulties need to be resolved at home and in Antigua linking the domestic and the colonial spheres which brings me back to Said's famous assessment of the novel. Said is highly critical of the imbalance that Austen bestows on Antigua and England as geographical settings in the text and reads Fanny as complicit with her slave-owning uncle. However, it is interesting that while Said mentions *Mansfield Park's* status as "pre-imperialist", he does not really enquire into its status as "post-abolition". Consequently, despite critiquing Austen for her neglect of Antigua as a setting, Said himself spends little time in reviewing the debate on the abolition of the slave trade and its aftermath in Britain in the fictional present of the novel (cf. Boulukos 2006: 366).

Unsurprisingly, there was a boom in postcolonial readings of *Mansfield Park* in the wake of Said's *Culture and Imperialism* in the second half of the 1990s (cf. Wood 2002: 298). It is worth noting that in the subsequent postcolonial and equally prevalent feminist debates there is a permanent conflation of the author Austen with her narrator or one of the protagonists and their supposed endorsement of slavery or its abolition. There are also disputes about misquoting individual characters, as in the famous silence surrounding slavery in *Mansfield Park* to which I will return. Said himself evidently struggled with a desire for a simultaneous literary "absolution" and a postcolonial reprobation of Austen's political views. Trying to avoid a banal "rhetoric of blame" (1994: 96), Said wants to be able to call out Austen on her politics *and* celebrate her as part of the "great tradition".<sup>8</sup> Said is, of course, correct in highlighting that the restricted English world of Austen's *Mansfield Park* knows no Black agency as embodied by Wedderburn. But this does not quite amount to unquestioned male authority.<sup>9</sup> To state that the colonial and the domestic sphere are entangled then is not to argue that they are equally represented in works of fiction, and strikingly, the familial feeling in Austen does not extend into the colonies. As Boulukos (2006: 366) persuasively points out, the most

problematic aspect in Said's framing is not that he challenges the lack of representation of Antigua as a setting but the idea that a critique of slavery is an anachronistic demand of postcolonial scholars today when, in fact, the debate on the abolition of slavery is contemporary to Austen.<sup>10</sup> Ambivalence is not something the critic retrospectively needs to attach to the politics of the author; it is already present in the text.

As the first of two female authors covered in this study after all, Austen's writing has been repeatedly discussed in relation to the historical coincidence of the emancipation of the enslaved and the "woman question" linking her to early feminist voices like Mary Wollstonecraft, but also to more conservative Evangelical abolitionists like Hannah More. Accordingly, within the ensuing critical debate, the politics of feminism and abolition are conflictually related. In contrast to Margaret Kirkham's emphasis on Austen's political radicalism, for example, in her *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (1997), more recent postcolonial scholarship addresses her collusion again,<sup>11</sup> while also being critical of Said's oversights.<sup>12</sup> On the whole Austen criticism itself has become a battlefield of poststructuralist versus more traditional schools of literary interpretation.<sup>13</sup> Now, more than thirty years after Said's reading was first published,<sup>14</sup> there also seems to be a worrying incipient backlash against both feminist and postcolonial literary criticism, especially regarding the significance attributed to the topic of enslavement.

Austen's familiarity with the issue is well-established given her praise of Thomas Clarkson's *History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1808) in a letter to her sister Cassandra (cf. Smith 1994: 212; Wiley 2014: 63; Wiltshire 2003: 311).<sup>15</sup> In Clarkson's abolitionist text, plantocrat John Norris is condemned for his misdeeds. Consequently, one can construe a link of names not only between Lord Mansfield and Mansfield Park,<sup>16</sup> but also between the detested slave owner and aunt Norris (cf. Ferguson 1991: 121; Kelly 2008: 178).<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Moira Ferguson has pointed out that Mansfield Park itself is even described as a plantation in the text (cf. MP 52; Ferguson 1991: 130). Hence, the setting Mansfield Park is palimpsestically linked to West Indian slavery rather than its blissful domestic counterpart, as which Said describes it. David Bartine and Eileen Maguire (2009: 35) make a similar point in offering a complex re-evaluation of Said's model of counterpoint, which transfers the musical capacity to juxtapose two different themes that are uttered simultaneously to literary readings. They distinguish tonal and dissonant counterpoint to highlight that counterpoint cannot only produce harmony (as Said argues).



While the tonal model of counterpoint would emphasise consonance or harmony, linked to the image of the home in literature, the atonal or dissonant mode would include tension suggesting the image of a “dissonated” home (Bartine and Maguire 2009: 39).<sup>18</sup>

So, to be clear, the main concern in the following is not the dispute whether Austen, the real-life person and author, was “proto-feminist” or a moralising conservative (cf. Butler 1987), whether she was opposed to the slave trade or supported British imperial ambitions (or, in this case, both, which I am inclined to believe). Rather I want to understand how familial feeling is constructed in the novel in relation to Britain’s role as an increasingly imperial rather than slave-holding nation. To this end, it is certainly apposite to demand close attention to the textual make-up of the source and how it addresses the coincidence of the qualms about the role of women and the status of formerly enslaved human beings. These developments shape the emotionally expanding vocabulary of the novel in the nineteenth century, in general, and Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, in particular. In clear contrast to John Wiltshire then, who in a reductive and frankly hostile remark, claims “Postcolonial criticism, in fact, has colonised *Mansfield Park*” (2003: 303), I believe it pertinent to engage with, rather than dismiss earlier postcolonial and feminist analyses of a canonical text that relies on silences and allusions. Wiltshire argues that associations of *Mansfield Park* with Lord Mansfield and Mrs Norris with the planter Norris are far-fetched ideologically inclined readings. He also questions whether the financial dependence on the Antiguan plantation is given undue credit by postcolonial critics<sup>19</sup>—but most of all, he contests the validity of analyses that claim an analogous relationship between the marriage market and/or governess trade and the slave trade—given the fact that (middle-class white) women were increasingly able to resist being married off against their will, as is evident in *Mansfield Park*. While I strongly disagree with what comes across as a conservative anti-feminist and anti-postcolonial “rescue” of the “true” Austen,<sup>20</sup> I do believe Wiltshire has a point in emphasising the limits of the problematic analogy of women’s status as “slaves” within patriarchal family constellations.<sup>21</sup> Not only does such a framing ignore the gender of enslaved women and men, it also plays down white women’s agency within colonial power relations, as has been widely noted. Fraiman, for instance, writes about Austen, “The imperialist gesture is to exploit the symbolic value of slavery, while ignoring slaves as suffering and resistant historical subjects” (1995: 813).

To do justice to these interdependent processes of Othering, I propose a more nuanced reading of Fanny's expressions of familial feeling that places greater emphasis on the representation of emotional ambivalence in the actual text, which I call her "will to feel" that is shaped by a new form of realistic introspection and uncertainty regarding expected emotionality. With this approach, I follow Janet Todd, who critically discusses and departs from earlier feminist attempts of identifying Austen either with conservative or progressive politics in the wake of the French Revolution and the debate on women's rights. She suggests a different approach, namely focusing on Austen's aesthetic rejection of the cult of sensibility. Todd argues that the "main motivator of Austen, beyond any party political purpose, is her opposition to sensibility in all its forms, whether it be romantic fantasy in young girls, spontaneous feminine understanding or intuition, political aspirations or plot expectations" (1991: 76). Nevertheless, this aesthetic rejection of sentimentalism and the associated infantilising of women as well as the depiction of the emotional maturing of Fanny in *Mansfield Park* is not happening in a political vacuum. It is clearly entangled with the debate on and the aftermath of the abolition of the slave trade.

When Fanny, her cousin Maria Bertram, who is engaged to be married to the prudent but boring Mr Rushworth, and Henry Crawford are stuck behind a locked gate on a walk on Rushworth's vast estate Sotherton, Maria is eager to bypass the obstacle without waiting for her fiancé's return with the key. Fanny believes this to be an unwise decision as Maria's prospects seem felicitously settled in contrast to her own. Nonetheless, in the ensuing conversation, in which Henry Crawford seduces Maria into bypassing the gate and, by extension, codes of proper feminine conduct, the starling of Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* reappears as an intertextual reference, linking women's obligation to getting married to Sterne's sentimentalised account of slavery that I discussed in the previous chapter. This form of intertextuality highlights that critiquing patriarchy by equating (white) women's limited agency with that of slaves was already a fairly conventionalised trope by this time (cf. Armstrong 1987; Ferguson 1992). Henry Crawford comments on Maria's lack of high spirits given her prospect of becoming the mistress of Sotherton:

"You have a very smiling scene before you."

"Do you mean literally or figuratively? Literally I conclude. Yes, certainly, the sun shines and the park looks very cheerful. But unluckily that iron gate,

that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. I cannot get out, as the starling said.” As she spoke, and it was with expression, she walked to the gate; he followed her. “Mr. Rushworth is so long fetching this key!”

“And for the world you would not get out without the key and without Mr. Rushworth’s authority and protection, or I think you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance; I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited.”

“Prohibited! nonsense! I certainly can get out that way and I will. Mr. Rushworth will be here in a moment you know—we shall not be out of sight.” (MP 93)

Coleman interprets this reference to Sterne as a comment on “men’s illegitimate power over women” and Sir Thomas’s tyranny (2009: n.pag.). For sure, in Austen’s writing there is an acute awareness of the tension between women’s expected behaviour and their growing desire for freedom, a longing that, as the quoting of Sterne’s starling underlines, derives to a large degree from their literacy and familiarity with novels. But while Austen’s fiction is, obviously, critical towards the pecuniary dependency of women, the starling episode is not a straightforward defence of female agency. Maria is mocked for her attention-seeking inauthenticity. Even Sterne’s original reference to slavery, as I have argued, is self-centred and can also already be read as challenging the conventions of sentimentalism. In this episode in *Mansfield Park*, it is not Fanny’s introspection on her (or her cousin’s) plight as women on the marriage market, but rather Maria’s imprudence and pretentious stance, uttered “with expression”, which is presented. Maria fulfils the role of the inauthentic scheming woman who only marries for her own benefit. To begin with, she is quite content with settling on Rushworth:

Being now in her twenty-first year, Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a duty; and as a marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father’s, as well as ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object, it became by the same rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could. (MP 37)

But when Henry Crawford speaks highly of her sister Julia, she cannot help feeling dissatisfied with her hasty attachment. Again, while the

narrator critiques the assumption of women's "duty" and "obligation" to marry for financial gain (cf. Sturrock 2006: 181), the starling is not an image of authentic critique of patriarchal family constellations (in Austen) or of slavery (in Sterne), but a reference to an obsolete sentimentalist wallowing in self-pity that the more prudent Fanny cannot accept. In contrast to Maria then, the constant emotional turmoil and lack of clarity in the narration of her inner thoughts make Fanny the more authentic anti-sentimental, and by extension modern, character in the logic of the novel. Maria does not express "authentic" emotions that are the hallmark of the new middle-class habitus but feels entrapped and bored and in this way is closer to an aristocratic impetus of wanting to be wooed. She is easily seduced by the more cosmopolitan charm of Mr Crawford and does not want to oblige the conventions of marriage quite yet, especially if this means competing with her sister—and thus the quotation of the starling's "I cannot get out" is, in fact, a misled comparison to slavery, as is already the case in Sterne's text, that highlights pretence rather than true feeling.

Part of Fanny Price's position as one of Austen's supposedly least likeable heroines (cf. Trilling 1954: 11) is precisely her moralising tone when it comes to proper conduct. She feels torn between what is socially expected of her and what she believes to be expedient. In this scene, "Fanny, feeling all this to be wrong, could not help making an effort to prevent it" (MP 93), but her cousin would not hear of it and leaves with Crawford: "Fanny was again left to her solitude, and with no increase of pleasant feelings, for she was sorry for almost all that she had seen and heard, astonished at Miss Bertram, and angry with Mr. Crawford" (MP 93–94). Familial decorum is difficult emotional terrain for the outsider: on the one hand, Fanny feels grateful and wants to please and, on the other, she is often overwhelmed by her own emotional (and religious) demands of morality—her lack of pleasant feeling coinciding with surprise and anger at the indiscretion of those who should be morally more refined than she is. In the Bertram family, the daughters appear spoilt and more interested in a good match or exciting distractions than finding true companionship. Hence, the critique of familial power relations in *Mansfield Park* is not simply directed at the men; the scheming women (including Lady Bertram and aunt Norris) are as much to blame. The reception of Fanny in the critical debate accordingly ranges from reading her as a "feminist rebel"—"it is this absence of servility that marks her capacity for resistance" (Easton 1998: 481)<sup>22</sup>—to a submissive "Christian heroine", as Lionel Trilling famously labelled her (1954: 12, cf. also Folsom and

Wiltshire 2014: 25–30). Is Austen's *Mansfield Park* then part of the novel tradition that works towards the "consolidation of authority", as Said claims (1994: 77), or, is she offering resisting feminist viewpoints, as Susan Fraiman has suggested (1995: 816)?

In contrast to her cousins, Fanny tries, first and foremost, to be "true" to her feelings, and if this means repudiating her uncle's plans for her, she will follow her convictions as in her eventual rejection of Crawford. Given Fanny's socially unclear position within the Bertram family, there is initial insecurity about her introduction to society and it is her obliviousness to Henry Crawford's attempts at entertaining her that gradually convince him of trying to seduce her. He wonders, "What is her character?—Is she solemn?—Is she queer?—Is she prudish?" (MP 213). While Fanny's emotional "queerness" only makes her more appealing in his eyes,<sup>23</sup> his sister Mary desires that he will "not be making her really unhappy" because "she is as good a little creature as ever lived and has a great deal of feeling" (MP 213). In contrast to her cousins, who were born into a social standing that prepared them for being courted, and the worldly Crawfords, to whom courtship feels like a competition, Fanny is depicted as actually caring about other people's feelings.

Preparing for her "outing", Fanny would like to wear the amber cross that her brother William gives her as a present but for which he could not afford a matching gold chain. Mary Crawford presses her into wearing a necklace she originally received from Henry. Once more the passage is rife with Fanny's emotional qualms: "She would rather perhaps have been obliged to some other person. But this was an unworthy feeling" (MP 239). This emotional confusion is only enhanced when Edmund also presents her with a necklace. By now Fanny has fallen for Edmund, who, unaware of Fanny's feelings, in turn, is smitten by Mary's kindness. Since Fanny can only join William's cross to Edmund's chain, she solves her dilemma by wearing both necklaces to the ball, which, according to Peter Smith (1994: 220), symbolise the alternatives of sedition and reform. And here yet again, one can draw a figurative connection between white women's status on the marriage market as akin to slavery, as the necklaces have been read as alluding to the chains of the enslaved (cf. Ferguson 1991: 124). In line with this thinking, Fanny has been described as the uncultured other (Ferguson 1991: 123), a "grateful slave" (Ferguson 1991: 124; cf. Boulukos 2008 for a critique of this trope), or simply "a slave" (Johnson 1988: 107; Smith 1994: 207) in the Bertram family.<sup>24</sup>

But while Fanny is indeed “bound” to the Bertrams, her relation to Sir Thomas, I would argue, is much more ambivalent than him yielding uncontested patriarchal power over her as a quasi “slaveholder”. Fanny expresses fear and awe towards him, and later, when he shows more affection, she feels emotionally confused and overwhelmed yet again. Feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar identify “the failure of the father” (2000 [1979]: 137) as a recurring theme in Austen’s oeuvre, and much of *Mansfield Park*’s plot revolves around challenged paternal authority rather than straightforward control, literally at home and figuratively as colonial rule abroad. The prohibition of the unseemly theatre production and the need to re-establish order in the colonies are thus linked:

It is our contention that the irony clearly emergent in the last chapter renders a false harmony which underscores the dissonance that remains present in the imperial/paternal order as represented in life at Mansfield Park. In part, it is the artificial *deus ex machina* and summary manner in which Austen closes out her characters that suggests the false harmony. (Bartine and Maguire 2009: 47)<sup>25</sup>

As Bartine and Maguire point out regarding the ending, the tonal ambivalence of the entire novel to a large degree rests on the domestication of the free indirect discourse representing Fanny’s ambivalent familial feeling into the (endogamic) marriage plot, supplied by narrator summary in the closing remarks to which I will return. This also relates to the supposedly all-overpowering position of the “patriarch” in the text, whose absence is the precondition for the ensuing sexual liberties and familial drama and whose return initiates the restoration of familial order.

To begin with, the male absentee planter is confronted with two entangled geographies of familial disorder in England and the Caribbean, and Ferguson even speculates about a possible sexual transgression of Sir Thomas in Antigua (cf. 1991: 127).<sup>26</sup> Stewart, too, discusses the two themes, “the patriarch’s chronic absenteeism and the woman’s dangerous sexuality” (1993: 109), as interlinked threats in the gendered imperial order of the time.<sup>27</sup> At home, as outlined, Fanny seems to follow a strict moral code and, at least at first, does not question her uncle’s authority. The greatest test of Sir Thomas’s role as *paterfamilias* in *Mansfield Park* is the preparation of a private theatrical production in his absence. The intertextual inclusion of Elizabeth Inchbald’s 1798 popular play *Lovers’ Vows*, an adaptation of the German *Das Kind der Liebe* of 1780 by August von

Kotzebue, supports this line of argument. In the play, Frederick is a “bastard”, who (like Wedderburn) is quite recalcitrant about this status and voices disdain towards his father. He contends, “No—why should I ever know my father, if he is a villain! My heart is satisfied with a mother. [...] I will work all day at the plough, and all the night with my pen”. For he is “a dutiful son for the sake of a helpless mother” (Kotzebue 1798: 13). In exact opposition, Fanny, up to this point, is the dutiful niece/“daughter” of an absent uncle/father. Given the delicate subject matter of the drama, both Fanny and Edmund agree that the play is “exceedingly unfit for private representation” (MP 130). Additionally, Edmund objects to Tom’s acquaintance Charles Maddox’s presence at Mansfield Park because he fears the “excessive intimacy [...], the *more* than intimacy—the familiarity” (MP 142) of the strange man in the house. The intertext is both present and absent in the novel, as Plasa argues: “Constantly alluded to and anticipated but never staged, *Lovers’ Vows* is simultaneously included and excluded within *Mansfield Park*” (2000: 48). The spatial and indeed highly gendered ordering of the family mansion is overcast dangerously by the theatrical. By refusing to act herself, Fanny is depicted as holding on to her ideal of moral and affective authenticity that she sees tainted by pretence, even if for the purpose of performance.<sup>28</sup>

Subsequently, the unexpected early return of Sir Thomas marks the reconfiguration of familial order that also leads to a newfound emotionality towards Fanny.<sup>29</sup> This novel form of familial feeling, however, only adds to Fanny’s ongoing emotional confusion and more than anything feels oppressive:

“Why do not I see my little Fanny?” And on perceiving her, came forward with a kindness which astonished and penetrated her, calling her his dear Fanny, kissing her affectionately, and observing with decided pleasure how much she was grown! Fanny knew not how to feel, nor where to look. She was quite oppressed. He had never been so kind, so *very* kind to her in his life. (MP 165)

The strain from the colonial turmoil is compensated in an emphasis on domestic quiescence. Physically altered—“he was grown thinner and had the burnt, fagged, worn look of fatigue and a hot climate, every tender feeling was increased” (MP 166)—Sir Thomas explains his dislike of acting:

“That I should be cautious and quick-sighted, and feel many scruples which my children do *not* feel, is perfectly natural; and equally so that *my* value for domestic tranquillity, for a home which shuts out noisy pleasures, should much exceed theirs.” (MP 173)

Quietness befalls Mansfield Park once the theatrical production is shut down for good and Fanny believes that her uncle only wants “the repose of his own family circle” (MP 182). Stewart (1993: 31) reads this new accent on familial intimacy as affecting both genders in the house now.

However, Sir Thomas can only resort to the domestic home and hearth once he returns from the colonies: his changed physical appearance, his new emotionality, and his wish to talk about Antigua suddenly shape the domestic mood at Mansfield Park. In contrast to his own children, Fanny becomes quite intrigued by the reasons behind these developments, as the central passage on slavery, the mentioned famous “dead silence”, which ensues when she asks him about slavery (cf. Said 1994: 96), underlines. To gain a better understanding of this passage, I quote at some length how the conversation between Edmund and Fanny, who summarise the events in the family circle the night before, unfolds. This dialogue is shaped by Fanny’s unease about Edmund (still not aware of her feelings for him) repeating some of the compliments that Sir Thomas extended to her the night before.

“The evenings do not appear long to me. I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies. I could listen to him for an hour together. It entertains *me* more than many other things have done—but then I am unlike other people, I dare say.” [...]

“Your uncle is disposed to be pleased with you in every respect; and I only wish you would talk to him more.—You are one of those who are too silent in the evening circle.”

“But I do talk to him more than I used. I am sure I do. Did not you hear me ask him about the slave trade last night?”

“I did—and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of farther.”

“And I longed to do it—but there was such a dead silence! And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject, I did not like—I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel.” (MP 183–184)



While Brian Southam argues in “The Silence of the Bertrams” (1995), much like Said, that Fanny addresses a taboo subject, recent commentators are much more hesitant about what the “dead silence” signifies and whose silence this includes: her cousins’, her uncle’s, both? (cf. Tuite 2000: 104). Ferguson reads the stillness as connected to the slave insurrections that are not supposed to enter this familial narrative, in which “slave subjectivity has to be effaced” (1991: 133)—literally linking the silence in the mansion to the silenced subaltern. In a more cautious attempt to read closer to the text, Boulukos warns that such postcolonial readings might be overdetermined. Instead, he highlights that Fanny is silent because her female cousins shun the topic, her uncle, at least in Edmund’s view, would have been pleased “to be inquired of farther”. Boulukos thus understands this conversation as showcasing Fanny’s modesty (not trying to stand out at the expense of Maria and Julia) and exemplifying a possible ameliorationist position of Sir Thomas as a “progressive” reformer of slaveholding. Boulukos further argues that it is, in fact, Said’s contemporary qualms with the literary archive of how to address issues like slavery and imperialism in (high) literary criticism that causes such misplaced emphasis on the silence on slavery.<sup>30</sup>

Austen could reasonably expect her readers to connect it to a very familiar—indeed a culturally central—discourse. Said’s method, which necessitates “recovering” the repressed presence of slavery and colonialism, depends on denying the familiarity of the slave trade as a topic of discussion. (Boulukos 2006: 365)

In this reasoning, there is no contemporary need for delicacy, as slavery was a widely addressed topic in public and literary discourse in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Indeed, following abolition, Britain’s new imperial role is framed as a moral responsibility in the sense of a “civilising mission”. So rather than condemning slavery, it is the absence of proper familial/imperial control, which is supposedly plaguing the West Indian plantation system.<sup>31</sup> In this understanding, the purportedly enlightened benevolent upper-class absentee planter needs to interfere to stop the uncouth behaviour of their working-class overseers abroad, who are considered the problem by exerting unnecessary force in supervising the enslaved. According to this ameliorationist agenda, the “workforce” would submit willingly in a more humane system. Actually, the imaginary vision of such a form of control

rested on voluntary procreation and the introduction of forms of respectable West Indian slave marriages—an allegedly “natural way” to compensate for the outlawed trade in human beings (cf. Boulukos 2006: 371). Hence, rather than constructing a binary of for or against slavery, we need to concede that positions which were critical of the inhumanity of the slave trade could still be reconciled with versions of a reformation of the plantation system in the early nineteenth century. Precisely because these subject matters could fit into the narrative of familial uplift, they were entirely plausible as topics of polite conversation.

But the growing financial insecurity from the Caribbean system of slavery also leads to a new interest in imperial expansion into Africa and Asia and the introduction of a new “fantasy of ‘free’ yet racialized coercive labor” in the reliance on so-called coolies hailing from both China and South Asia (Lowe 2015: 26) that shapes the post-abolition nineteenth century. Again, the familial and the imperial world are intertwined as references to the Navy in Austen’s writing highlight. Britain can display naval might regarding rivalries with France, bolstering a novel pro-imperialism and, at the same time, maintain moral superiority through policing of the slave trade. The British Navy also makes up for familial shortcomings in old aristocratic exchanges of women; it offers new forms of class mobility for men of the lesser gentry and even men like William Price. “The navy becomes a true brotherhood, a better source of hospitality and neighborliness than relatives; the nation-state supplies the deficiencies of family and community alike”, argues Ruth Perry (1994: 103) with reference to *Persuasion* (Austen 2003c [1817]). The increasing global entanglements of Britain that led to more class mobility coincide with an emphasis on the ideal of the home and the rise of global consumerism. The prospect of William going to the East Indies in *Mansfield Park*, after all, first and foremost means a pretty shawl or two for Lady Bertram (cf. MP 282). Clara Tuite explains these broader social changes:

There is a direct correlation between the novel’s regime of familial incorporation and retrenchment, and the post-abolition and pre-emancipation imperial regime, which we could refer to as a regime characterized also by the discourse of improvement and of investment. Austen’s novel registers or enacts this coincidence between British imperial expansion and the diminution of the aristocratic family [...]. (2000: 100)

For Tuite, Austen's depiction of the Bertram family embodies the transitions that the landed gentry faced realistically rather than dwell in an idealised image of an aristocratic family.

Generically situated between country-house and domestic novel, everything following the aborted theatricals revolves around securing the right kind of marriages for all protagonists. After Crawford leaves Mansfield Park, first the marriage between disappointed Maria and Rushworth is discussed by Sir Thomas and his daughter in terms that explicitly highlight the tension between happiness and alliance, as this longer excerpt shows. He

tried to understand *her* feelings. Little observation there was necessary to tell him that indifference was the most favourable state they could be in. Her behaviour to Mr. Rushworth was careless and cold. She could not, did not like him. Sir Thomas resolved to speak seriously to her. Advantageous as would be the *alliance*, and long standing and public as was the engagement, her *happiness* must not be sacrificed to it. Mr. Rushworth had perhaps been accepted on too short an acquaintance, and on knowing him better she was repenting.

With solemn kindness Sir Thomas addressed her; told her his fears, inquired into her wishes, entreated her to be open and sincere, and assured her that every inconvenience should be braved, and the connection entirely given up, if she felt herself *unhappy* in the prospect of it. He would act for her and release her. [...] She thanked him for his great attention, his paternal kindness, but he was quite mistaken in supposing she had the smallest desire of breaking through her engagement, or was sensible of any change of opinion or inclination since her forming it. She had the highest esteem for Mr. Rushworth's character and disposition, and could not have a doubt of her *happiness* with him.

Sir Thomas was satisfied; too glad to be satisfied perhaps to urge the matter quite so far as his judgment might have dictated to others. It was an *alliance* which he could not have relinquished without pain; and thus he reasoned. Mr. Rushworth was young enough to improve. [...] Her feelings probably were not acute; [...] but her comforts might not be less on that account, and if she could dispense with seeing her husband a leading, shining character, there would certainly be everything else in her favour. A well-disposed young woman, who did not marry for love, was in general but the more attached to her own family, and the nearness of Sotherton to Mansfield must naturally hold out the greatest temptation [...]. Such and such like were the reasonings of Sir Thomas—*happy* to escape the embarrassing evils of a rupture, the wonder, the reflections, the reproach that must attend it,

*happy* to secure a marriage which would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence, and very *happy* to think any thing of his daughter's disposition that was most favourable for the purpose. (MP 186–187, emphasis added)

It is quite interesting to observe in this exchange between father and daughter how the seemingly authentic concern for *her* happiness, which must not be sacrificed for the sake of alliance, shifts into *his* happiness; repeated three times as Sir Thomas's gain: he is *happy* that he does not have to embarrassingly call off the marriage, *happy* that his relatively low status of a Baronet—in contrast to the well-established aristocratic Rushworths (cf. Steffes 1996: 35–36)—will be elevated by this new connection in the region, and finally, he is *happy* that he has achieved all of this without having to appear oblivious of his daughter's true feelings.<sup>32</sup> *Mansfield Park* challenges the family as the uncontested locus of sexuality, albeit in terms that make Maria's and Henry's behaviour seem reproachful, especially from the point of view of the moral centre, the focalizer Fanny.

With the Bertram sisters leaving Mansfield Park for London following Maria's wedding, Henry Crawford confesses his new plans to marry Fanny Price to his sister Mary. She replies: "Does she know her own happiness?" (MP 270). Fanny's emotional composition is tied repeatedly to her status as an object of exchange between the Bertram and Crawford families and the question of whose happiness counts seems unclear; "she is the very one to make you happy", states Mary (MP 271), while her brother is sure that: "I will make her very happy, Mary, happier than she has ever yet been herself, or ever seen anybody else" (MP 271). But Fanny is only experiencing "utmost confusion of contrary feelings" (MP 278), as the following description of contradictory emotions underlines: "She was feeling, thinking, trembling about everything;—agitated, happy, miserable, infinitely obliged, absolutely angry" (MP 279). Having never expected to be in a situation where she has to reject a suitor, Fanny fights with her troubled rivalling affections for her brother and Edmund as well as her continuous repudiation of the unwanted attention from Henry Crawford. The third book accordingly begins with Fanny's rejection of Crawford, marking her emotional agency.

Initially, Sir Thomas accuses her of being "[s]elf-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful" (MP 295). Paradoxically, the modern female individual puts her own desires before the familial concerns of lineage and

reputation here, which, in turn, is interpreted as too much emotionality and immaturity: “I am half inclined to think, Fanny, that you do not quite know your own feelings” (MP 292) and her uncle continues to accuse her of a new form of modern “perverse” wilfulness in young women:

I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse [...]. (MP 293)

Fanny’s inclusion into the family highlights the conflicted terrain of selfless familial affection as opposed to a charitable project of reform. Makdisi accordingly interprets *Mansfield Park* as epitomising the shifts from the outdated mode of violent control with regard to slavery in the Caribbean and the family in the domestic sphere to a new form of nineteenth-century self-government, both in imperial and familial terms (2014: 138) and Wood in his reading also emphasises Austen’s parodic reference to the concept of “improvement” (2002: 296).

However, while I find the general political shift described by these critics highly plausible, Fanny seems less controlled in her affective reactions. She continuously struggles to fulfil the obligations of sympathy in her role as a progressively independent feeling subject with genuine emotionality. As Festa succinctly puts it, “Fanny Price does *not* feel as she ought” (2009: 450). Despite her outsider position, she is the only one who is immersed in the happiness of others. Following the departure of the Bertram sisters, Fanny genuinely misses them: “their tender-hearted cousin [...] thought of them, and felt for them, with a degree of affectionate regret which they had never done much to deserve” (MP 189). Boulukos describes this as a form of governmentality of gratitude that was also expected of “grateful slaves”. The dependent young woman Fanny, in his reading, “resists heroically” and does not follow “obligations of gratitude” (Boulukos 2008: 26). According to Sara Ahmed’s study on *Willful Subjects* (2014), expressions of will and compliance are closely related to the capacity to resist: “willfulness as a judgment tends to fall on those who are *not* compelled by the reasoning of others” (2014: 15) and “If will is narratable as freedom (to will freely is to be one’s own cause) then freedom is affectively registered as guilt” (2014: 27). In order to become free then, Fanny must resist notions of obligation.<sup>33</sup> But despite this inclusion of rebellious

interiority, the ending with its emphasis on endogamy seems to work against Fanny's more genuinely modern "will to feel", which I refer to as the novel's resisting tonality.<sup>34</sup>

Endogamy is interpreted as a satirical strategy to cope with financial losses analogous to the restructuring of the post-abolition plantocracy by Tuite. She describes this as a "combination of critique and satire and instruction in the values of domesticity" (2000: 99) and accentuates that satire nevertheless includes elements of conservative restoration (2000: 102). Read as a more traditional "country-house novel" (2000: 96) *Mansfield Park* displays an interest in the policing of family, the incest taboo, as well as the exclusion of the upwardly mobile Crawfords. The final pairing of Fanny and her cousin Edmund, with whom she grew up like a brother after all, as well as her enchantment with her naval brother William, highlight the levelling of Fanny's aspirations for emotional modernity into an incestuous<sup>35</sup> version of "little England" in the end.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, before coming to a resolution, Fanny returns to her original family in Portsmouth once more. There she quickly realises that everything is uncomfortable; her old home is too small, her family too uncouth, the place too loud and not as civilised as Mansfield Park. Fraiman (1995: 810) interprets this as two opposing forms of familial violence: what in Mansfield is silence, is noise in Portsmouth. Dunn too, emphasises that Fanny's unbelonging to both worlds can be seen as a reason for her emotional ambivalence: "since the flaws of most of the members of both families place severe limits on the types of emotional bonds which she is able to establish with them, she must do her duty and aspire to emotions that should ideally accompany such performance" (1995: 493). Fanny, on the one hand, like Wedderburn, has to voice her wilfulness to become a modern subject, but, at the same time, this can only be successful within the confines of the familiar. Her comfort at Mansfield finally counts—she cannot be married off against her will, and Sir Thomas too eventually prizes "domestic felicity" (MP 437) over pecuniary ambitions. Despite the initial disappointment, he now orders the fire to be lit in her room every day. This concession to female agency, in turn, is somewhat hastily brushed over in the "happy ending" of the novel that unites Fanny and Edmund.<sup>37</sup>

The eventual mutual affective attachment they develop for each other is only very briefly commented on in the last chapter which opens with the narrator emphasising, "My Fanny [...] must have been happy in spite of every thing. She must have been a happy creature in spite of all that she

felt or thought she felt” (MP 428). The narrator affectionately lays claim to the protagonist as “my Fanny” and, at the same time, the narrative discourse suddenly cannot access the principal focalizer’s emotional register: there is no free indirect thought anymore explaining Fanny’s emotions. Quite the opposite, the narrator proclaims happiness despite the lack of representation of “all that she felt or thought she felt”. With regard to this passage, Judith Burdan directs “our attention once again to Austen’s use of irony, to those insistent ‘musts’ that punctuate her narrative and train our ears to hear the ‘opposites’ that lie within them” (2001: 203). The section reads:

I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people.—I only entreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (MP 436)

This narrator summary no longer leaves room for the confused emotional introspection of the heroine but gives precedence to the queer temporality of heterosexuality,<sup>38</sup> “the time when it was quite natural that it should be so”, which shapes the Victorian ideal of domesticity in the further establishment of the domestic novel in the years to come. In how far this should be framed as parodic, as Claudia Johnson would have it, who speaks of the “unwontedly Sternean garrulity” (1988: 114) of the narrator, is not entirely clear (cf. also Voskuil 2014: 611). For Trilling, “Jane Austen’s irony is only secondarily a matter of tone. Primarily it is a method of comprehension” (1954: 9). Her novel depicts, probably for the first time, a degree of female emotional ambivalence, that, while not letting go of the ideal of the family altogether, makes it more self-reflexive than before. “Fanny’s inner life, her power to interrogate her own feelings, is one reason, perhaps *the* reason, she is the heroine” (Brown 2014: 117). *Mansfield Park* offers resisting tonalities precisely because of the incongruity between an ultimately conservative narrative voice and the supposed authenticity of the focalizer’s agitated mixed emotions.

WILFUL FAMILIARITY: ROBERT WEDDERBURN'S  
*THE HORRORS OF SLAVERY*

Born in Jamaica as the son of a Scottish planter and an enslaved woman named Rosanna, Robert Wedderburn came to England a free man in 1778 (HoS 66) or 1779 (HoS 45) and became a Unitarian preacher. Editor Iain McCalman calls Wedderburn a “tavern orator, debater and singer, as well as a radical preacher and performer” (HoS 5). In contrast to more prominent early transatlantic writers, such as self-educated and highly respectable Olaudah Equiano, who traces his lineage to an African dignitary, or Ignatius Sancho and his aspirational Black family life in London as a free man of letters, Wedderburn does not hide the fact that he was once imprisoned for blasphemous libel. Furthermore, Wedderburn’s insistence on his “unrespectable” familial background makes for an uncomfortable reading experience: “It is this unrespectability or roughness which distinguishes Wedderburn so decisively from his predecessors” (HoS 5), writes McCalman in his introduction to *The Horrors of Slavery*. The short abolitionist autobiography and somewhat obscure political pamphlet published in 1824, which Thomas calls “both life writing and jeremiad” (S. Thomas 2014b: 99), remains his most famous piece of writing.

Focusing on an exchange of letters between Wedderburn and a Miss Campbell that was printed in *The Axe Laid to the Root*, a periodical that Wedderburn published himself in the wake of his involvement with “Thomas Spence’s circle of ex-Jacobin revolutionaries and agrarians in 1813” (McCalman in HoS 12; cf. also McCalman 1993), Linebaugh and Rediker read Wedderburn as “a theorist of the Atlantic proletariat” (2000: 313),<sup>39</sup> indebted to the biblical idea of Jubilee.<sup>40</sup> However, in this publication as well as in letters Wedderburn repeatedly invents fictional addressees—for example a supposed editor of said journal. The exchange with this alleged half-sister Miss Campbell, whose existence historians Linebaugh and Rediker accept as factual, is now more widely questioned (cf. Morris 2011; S. Thomas 2014a: 510–511).<sup>41</sup> Both McCalman and Morris interpret this as Wedderburn’s attempts to “give the impression of a community of correspondents” (Morris 2011: n.pag.). Writing is used here not only to claim individuality; it is employed strategically to evoke a community of solidarity—even if it is an invented one. Once more, we see that early Black Atlantic writing needs to be situated in more ambivalent aesthetic and political contexts than simply discern the supposed radicalness of these first published texts by Black authors. The literariness of



Wedderburn is not so much a question of style, which is often characterised as oral given his practice as a public speaker, but of understanding writing as a direct tool in the call for action, disregarding the distinction of fact and fiction as well as the demands of literary originality.<sup>42</sup> Wedderburn's prose is probably the least polished and therefore might also sit less easily within my entangled account of how the British novel rose to generic fame but I do believe that his text quite uniquely uses notions of wilful familiarity that are based in nineteenth-century novelistic conventions as well as imagine a newly inclusive transnational audience that goes beyond eighteenth-century transatlantic writing and that can and indeed should be understood as a Black male counterweight to the white female introspection that Austen presents.

Hence, rather than engage in the enquiry into the historical accuracy of Wedderburn's possibly invented voices, which Sue Thomas has unfurled quite helpfully (2014a), I will focus on the *Horrors of Slavery* as a wayward literary text that moves further away from sentimentalism and challenges conventions of familial feeling by plagiarising well-established abolitionist discourse and claiming a new form of mixed-race subjectivity in writing. Following from the cautionary remarks in the introduction regarding a binary rather than entangled perspective on canonical and marginalised authors, I believe we have to resist a premature romanticisation of political radicalness in this endeavour. The notion of entanglement highlights that neat boundaries between Austen's supposed conservatism as opposed to Wedderburn's radicalness will only get us this far. So rather than focus too narrowly on the autobiographical, Wedderburn's text should also be treated as literature. Like Austen's *Mansfield Park*, *The Horrors of Slavery* is no longer simply sentimental in tone, but in contrast to the more famous domestic novel, it does not embrace the ideal of reform which is to become central to Victorian conceptions of familial care. While Austen's heroine Fanny Price dismisses her less respectable Portsmouth working-class family in favour of the more orderly world of the Bertrams, her struggles are depicted as internal only. Wedderburn uses his family history as an exemplum to demand global justice and changes in how the formerly enslaved and colonised should be considered in relation to Britain.

Obviously, such variation in aesthetic choices can be explained by the generic differences between Austen's novelistic discourse and Wedderburn's life writing. But his unconventional narrative is also distinctly different from other Black Atlantic authors whose work is autobiographical as well. Wedderburn's texts, Innes argues,

illustrate his difference from Equiano, or his later compatriot, Mary Seacole. For whereas these writers are concerned with self-improvement, and with representing the extent of their individual achievement which often involves acceptance in English society, Wedderburn is chiefly concerned with denouncing the injustices not only of slavery, but also of a society where gross poverty and inequality is endemic. (2002: 58)

Even though the pamphlet is dedicated to the most famous British abolitionist of all, William Wilberforce, who visited Wedderburn in prison and encouraged him to publish his story,<sup>43</sup> Wedderburn does not emphasise Englishness and affective bonds with his fellow Christians, as the more common sentimental abolitionist discourse would. Wedderburn combines sentimental pathos with a new, unrespectable and resisting tone. This emphasis on being a social failure and his resistance to narratives of self-improvement, as McCalman notes (in HoS 4) (cf. also Pencek 2014: 63), could be read as a truly anti-social queer move of embracing failure *avant la lettre*. The text opens with conventional sentimental strategies of abolitionist writing by attributing the eponymous “horrors of slavery” to white cruelty (cf. Bernier 2007: 73). This is almost always linked to the disregard of familial bonds—the selling of children and the concomitant mother’s suffering and so on, all common tropes aimed at humanising enslaved people of African descent. But Wedderburn’s family narrative is unabashedly recalcitrant. So, on the one hand, *The Horrors of Slavery* is surely the most overtly political intervention into British hegemony from a Black perspective at the time. On the other hand, there is longing for the family that is also quite unique.

Looking back at his life the more than sixty-year-old Wedderburn states at the outset of his account: “To my unfortunate origin I must attribute all my miseries and misfortunes” (HoS 44). Accordingly, Eric Pencek calls this an “autobiographical denunciation of his father” (2014: 61).<sup>44</sup> Through his unapologetic acknowledgement of interracial sexualised violence, Wedderburn’s text repudiates idealised family conceptions and shows the intimate entanglements between the Caribbean and Britain. The source of stigma here is not his Black but specifically his white heritage. Wedderburn begins straightforwardly:

I must explain at the outset of this history—what will appear unnatural to some—the reason of my abhorrence and indignation at the conduct of my father. From him I have received no benefit in the world. By him my mother

was made the object of his brutal lust, then insulted, abused, and abandoned; and, within a few weeks from the present time, a younger and more fortunate brother of mine, the aforesaid A. Colville [sic], Esq. has had the insolence to revile her memory in the most abusive language, and to stigmatise her for that which was owing to the deep and dark iniquity of my father. Can I contain myself at this? or, have I not the feelings of human nature within my breast? (HoS 45)

His seemingly “unnatural” disavowal of his father is rooted in the inhumanity of treating his mother as his property (cf. HoS 47). This family heritage is complicated by reversing colour-coded and racialised hierarchies, describing his Black mother’s stigma as an effect of his white father’s moral lapse, his “dark iniquity”. It is precisely Wedderburn’s capacity to feel like any other human being that torments the son of an “abandoned” mother who still wishes to establish bonds with his white father, continuously claiming the status as “brother” of A. Colville, his white half-brother who denounces these familial ties. The true “horror” of Wedderburn’s writing then is not slavery in the literal sense, which he never experienced first-hand (cf. Morris 2011: n.pag.; H. Thomas 2000: 269; S. Thomas 2014a), but his familiarity with both his father’s abuse and his mother’s suffering. Convicted for blasphemy, connected to radicals and pornographers, Wedderburn is not a compliant sentimental figure on whom easy sympathy can be bestowed, although he, like other abolitionists before him, claims humanity via the capacity to feel. His published testimony, in the 1820s we have to remember still quite exceptional for a Black writer, is an important means to claim subject status, “to say what I am, and who were the authors of my existence” (HoS 44). He is testifying to how he was *written* into his unfortunate circumstances, the product of several competing scripts it seems, among them his conversion to Christianity<sup>45</sup> and political radicalism seem intimately intertwined with his family history. Accordingly, Helen Thomas argues that Wedderburn “portrays himself as a Christ-like but militantly radical saviour who must reject and disobey his earthly father” (2000: 261). He endorses “the paradigm of the mulatto as a radical agent of socioeconomic transformation” (2000: 262). However, this alleged “radical agent” continues to seek approval from his hostile paternal family.

Can we thus establish a connection between the unruly tone of his polyphonic pamphlet to his racial positionality, to what Thomas calls the “paradigm of the mulatto” and what I would term a wilful text? Again, I

want to frame the resistances of Wedderburn as somewhat more ambivalent than simply equate his writing (or racialised positionality) with political radicalness. While Equiano and Sancho have only little connection to their African parentage, Wedderburn and Seacole both have white Scottish fathers and Jamaican mothers. For Seacole, this heritage turns her into the ideal ambassador for the British empire, as I will argue in the following chapter, for Wedderburn the intrafamilial violence is the beginning of his life-long misery. Consequently, rather than read him in the context of postcolonial hybridity (cf. Bhabha 1994), my emphasis on wilfulness, which was connected to a kind of female perversion in Austen, is meant here to highlight the violent perverse material aspects of sexualised violence that inform the affective mode of the narrative.

The ubiquitous rhetorical sentimental question, “Hath not a slave feelings?” (HoS 47), is dutifully quoted (or plagiarised one could argue) by Wedderburn to explain and defend his mother’s rebellious temper. Wedderburn states in full: “Hath not a slave feelings? If you starve them, will they not die? If you wrong them, will they not revenge? Insulted on one hand, and degraded on the other, was it likely that my poor mother could practise the Christian virtue of humility, when her Christian master provoked her to wrath?” (HoS 47–48). But more than the abolitionist claim to feeling, Innes reads this passage as an adaptation of Shylock’s famous speech in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (III.1) (cf. Innes 2002: 57).

The religious difference of Jew versus Cristian is transferred by Wedderburn to the juxtaposition of enslaved versus free Christian. Shylock’s monologue reads:

[...] I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions [...] If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. ([1596] in Shakespeare 1998: 438)

Aleida Assmann (2015: 177–180) characterises this scene as inherently ambivalent: On the one hand, it is supposed to evince shared humanity and seeks to trigger empathy—which, Assmann argues, presupposes the sharing of feeling with an Other (here “the Jew”) in contrast to sympathy

that is built on similarity—but quickly tilts into the threat of revenge of the “vindictive Jew”, essentialising difference as a boundary that cannot be overcome by physical similarities. Christian and Jew, in Shakespeare, and master and slave, in Wedderburn, are similar in their physical wants, their bodies’ capabilities more alike than different in their need for nourishment, but still these similarities are violently overlooked. Departing from the abolitionist familiar formula, “Am I Not a Man, and A Brother?”, Wedderburn’s mother is granted similarity (in feeling) but a new (or in fact older, less acquiescent Shakespearean) form of agency that implies revolt. Accordingly, Wedderburn’s appeal to sameness must be read not as a call for white benevolence, but rather as the origin of Black anger and revolutionary threat. “If you wrong them, will they not revenge?” Slavery is not a pitiful spectacle that white sentimentalism can bemoan as a distant past; it still threatens Britain’s contemporary social peace, which Wedderburn’s references to bloodshed in Haiti only underline. His text in this way also addresses a transatlantic audience and does not simply cater to a supposedly empathic and progressive British abolitionist elite. This is striking because the fear of such incendiary rhetoric (language that via affective power translates into direct action) in the context of the terror of revolution (both exemplified by the events in France 1789 and Haiti 1791–1804 during his lifetime) was often seen as contributing to a backlash against the early abolitionist campaign headed by Wilberforce whose bills to abolish the slave trade were rejected repeatedly in the early 1790s and one reason why the abolitionist movement only succeeded once the political climate had become calmer in 1807 eventually.

Sometimes, Wedderburn rhetorically denounces violence and states that he is fearful of “the prospect of a general rebellion and massacre” (HoS 61) in the West Indies. At other times, he proclaims that an uprising will be the result of continued support for the plantation economy, and thus, he more than other Black authors evokes Black agency in overthrowing the system of enslavement for good.<sup>46</sup> In the first edition of *The Axe Laid to the Root* from 1817, he writes, “Oh, ye oppressed, use no violence to your oppressors, convince the world you are rational beings, follow not the example of St. Domingo, [...] leave revengeful practices for European kings and ministers.” And he encourages them instead to stage a sort of sleep-in of appearing one hour late to their labours arguing that, “The universality of your sleeping and non-resistance, will strike terror to your oppressors” (in HoS 81). Wedderburn simultaneously claims the moral high ground by not succumbing to the vile practices of “European kings

and ministers” and implicitly threatens the “oppressors” with the terror that awaits them. Wedderburn pleads with the enslaved not to engage in direct violence but have faith in divine intervention on their behalf. Accordingly, Bernier argues that Wedderburn “translates the visceral to the imaginary by allowing their feelings of rage and anger to be expressed in symbolic and immediate literary language purposefully designed to incite the passions of their audience in favour of black emancipation” (2007: 74). Wedderburn evokes an (imaginary) entangled audience both in Britain and the Caribbean, including planters and enslaved, white men and women as well as people of colour.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, in recounting his life story Wedderburn continuously inverts expectations. Whereas in the colonialist racist logic, it is the climate and the licentiousness of the “native” women that leads white colonisers astray, the visibility of interracial offspring in the colonies and increasingly also in the metropole challenges familial and familiar British narratives. It is not the overt sexuality of the Black woman that corrupts his father, but the morally damaging effects of money, especially if used in dealing in human beings. “While my dear and honoured father was poor, he was chaste as any Scotchman, whose poverty made him virtuous; but the moment he became rich, he gave loose to his carnal appetites” (HoS 46). Honest working Scotchmen are exculpated from carnal sins and the detested father can be envisioned as once “dear and honoured”, epitaphs he repeatedly uses strategically to address both his father and his assumed brother. Wedderburn continues his account by juxtaposing his father’s lacking education (“[m]y father’s mental powers were none of the brightest”) with his mother’s abilities, who “had received an education which perfectly qualified her to conduct a household in the most agreeable manner” (HoS 46). The appraisal of his mother continues: his father gave him freedom, so he never had to endure slavery, but he cherishes his mother’s insubordinate temper: “I glory in her *rebellious* disposition, [...] which I have inherited from her” (HoS 59). Talkee Amy, his maternal grandmother, too, is described as heroically stubborn. The perversion of the plantation system is the simultaneous familiarity and lack of familial affection which becomes more than obvious when Wedderburn recounts how a young man flogs his grandmother, a woman who “had brought up this young villain from eight years of age, and, till now, he had treated her as a mother” (HoS 49). The sexual and familial intimacy of the plantation for a long time was considered safely separate from the ordered domesticity in Britain, with *Mansfield Park* a case in point. Nevertheless, as Wedderburn’s

story shows, scruples about enslaving their own children seem to have persuaded more and more slave owners to grant their offspring freedom, probably unsuspecting that they could or would cross the Atlantic to claim a part in the family.

This increasing visibility and in Wedderburn's case literary articulation of mixed-race offspring is one of the most striking signs of the global entanglements of British familial feeling. This form of tabooed genealogy impacts people of African descent to this very day. In her momentous auto-ethnographic study *Lose Your Mother* Saidiya Hartman critically interrogates the contemporary African American affective desire to frame the history of slavery as one of severed familial bonds, with the dead white patriarchs still haunting this lineage to this day:

Who fails to recognize the figures, the planter and the concubine, the other tragic couple of the New World romance, a romance not of exalted fathers but of defiling ones? Who hasn't heard it all before? The story of murky adulterated bloodlines, rapacious masters, derelict fathers, and violated mothers. *Bastaard* was what the Dutch called their mixed-race brood; the term implied an illegitimate child as well as a mongrel. If these dead white fathers could speak, no doubt they would be hard-pressed to allow "son" or "daughter" to pass through their lips. Yet these ghostly patriarchs commanded more attention than anyone else in our battered line, if only because they could be named. (2008: 77–78)

In *The Horrors of Slavery*, the discrepancy between Wedderburn's father's brutality and his mother's suffering functions as a wedge into the sentimentalised rhetoric of family. Literally, he is not the "man and brother" but the more horrific "bastard offspring" who does not claim simply abstract human dignity via emotionality but actual familiarity. But in contrast to the lost family ties that Hartman describes, Wedderburn can actually reconstruct his matrilineal and patrilineal heritage and he even seems to indulge a certain pride in the violent undertones of his white Scottish ancestry as much as in his Black maternal resilience. He claims his Scottish lineage via his last name from his father James Wedderburn, Esq. of Inveresk near Musselborough (1730–1807). James Wedderburn was the third child of Sir John Wedderburn, fifth Baronet of Blackness (1704–1746), who had embraced the cause of the exiled House of Stuart and fought at Culloden. Because of his involvement in the Jacobite Rebellion, John Wedderburn was executed in

November 1746 and the Baronetcy of Wedderburn was forfeited. Subsequently, James Wedderburn, like other family members, made his fortune in Jamaica as a sugar planter.<sup>48</sup> He returned to Scotland in 1773 where he assumed the name of Wedderburn Colvile<sup>49</sup> in 1807. Hence his son, Wedderburn's presumable half-brother, is called Andrew Colvile (1779–1856/1865?).<sup>50</sup> Wedderburn's father thus is no nameless “ghostly patriarch”.

On entering England for the first time in 1779, Wedderburn even speculates about his Scottish rebel grandfather:

My grandfather was a staunch Jacobite, and exerted himself strenuously in the cause of the Pretender, in the rebellion of the year 1745. For his aiding to restore the exiled family to the throne of England, he was tried, condemned, and executed. He was hung by the neck till he was dead; his head was then cut off, and his body was divided into four quarters.<sup>51</sup> When I first came to England, in the year 1779, I remember seeing the remains of a rebel's skull which had been affixed over Temple Bar; but I never yet could fully ascertain whether it was my dear grandfather's skull, or not. (HoS 45)

Wedderburn from time to time distances himself from the atrocities of his slave-owning Scottish ancestors and, simultaneously, seems to want to be included in this rebellious Scottish tribe, repeatedly speaking fondly of his “dear” grandfather (who most certainly would not have accepted him as kin) and his “dear father” who did give him freedom after all. Linking Scottish and Jamaican histories, the Wedderburn family exemplifies how the political turmoil on the British Isles had concrete global effects with Jamaica becoming an exile and way to uphold family incomes for the time being until a return of the Jacobite offspring seemed feasible.

It is the literal familial connection (including the monetary implications), which Wedderburn demands, entering a dispute with his Scottish family about his inclusion into the Wedderburn clan. To do so publicly, as Wedderburn did, was an unheard-of affront that the half-brother tries to stop by threatening him with legal action. Ending up poor in Britain, Wedderburn had sought financial support from A. Colvile, calling him an “*affectionate brother*, who refused to relieve me” (HoS 60). Once Wedderburn publishes his account, Colvile contests Wedderburn's parentage as contrived (HoS 53) and adamantly maintains that his father never had “any connection of *that kind* with the mother of this man” (HoS 52, original emphasis). Wedderburn in turn disputes his white half-brother's attempts to exonerate their father while simultaneously claiming a share in



the profits from his sugar plantation—a paradoxical demand for an anti-slavery campaigner it would seem (cf. Morris 2011). Their correspondence as well as the letters of the editors of *Bell's Life in London* are included in *The Horrors of Slavery*.

The intermediary voice of the editors clearly sides with Wedderburn's account. Polemically now, the abolitionist slogan (as well as another reference to Shakespeare, this time to *Hamlet*) recurs and is tested when it comes to blood relations, as Wedderburn and Colvile's correspondence is framed by the mocking, "BROTHER OR NO BROTHER—'THAT IS THE QUESTION?'" (HoS 51). The editors even argue that as a gesture of reconciliation it is precisely the acceptance of such offspring into the realm of the familial that could be the beginning of healing the wounds that were caused when "the dearest ties of consanguinity are trampled upon by a sordid thirst of interest". They call for an inclusion of the "bastard" into the family, "an offspring that should be the more closely cemented by the ties of affection, [...] let, then, the bonds of sympathy lighten the bondage to which they were (however unjustly) born" (HoS 55). Quite radically then here the interracial family is imagined as a locus of affective reconciliation in the aftermath of slavery. To a certain degree this framing of interracial identity also reoccurs in Britain's emphasis on mixed families in contemporary national memorial culture that I will discuss in the conclusion. So, while Equiano hardly ever mentions his white wife and petitions for a return to Africa, Sancho establishes a respectable Black family of Sanchonettas and Seacole later refutes all allusions to possible sexual relations with white men, *The Horrors of Slavery* calls for the acceptance of interracial families, using the vocabulary of familial belonging. Wedderburn naturalises the idea of parenthood in light of violence against Black women.<sup>52</sup> The editors of *Bell's Life in London* even dare to ask of this alleged brother to imagine what it might feel like had his white mother endured the same fate (cf. HoS 57).

While *Mansfield Park* demonstrates that slavery has, in fact, become a topic of polite conversation in early nineteenth-century Britain, the tone of address seems tenuous. Part of this tenuousness, I believe, has to do with the slowly increasing visibility of mixed-race offspring like Wedderburn that showcases the lack of moral superiority that is supposedly attached to whiteness. Publishing his pamphlet, addressing audiences as a public speaker, but also in his letters to his half-brother, Wedderburn's familial discourse is affecting and disrupting the colonial separation that British families sought to uphold for as long as possible. In *Mansfield Park*, the

colonies are an abstract and distant realm of familial obligations and no character from the West Indies ever becomes a speaking subject, in Ahmed's terms a "willful subject", in the hushed discourse on slavery. Wedderburn in contrast tries to make his familial story public.

However, as with all Black writing of the period, not only the familial lineage but also authorship, as mentioned, remains complicated regarding, for instance, the questionable literacy and a possible amanuensis of Wedderburn (cf. Pencek 2014: 63; S. Thomas 2014b: 100). Pencek emphasises the oral style of *The Horrors of Slavery* (cf. 2014: 66) and argues, "Wedderburn not only appropriates wholesale other texts into his own, but also (probably) invents other voices with which to enter into dialogue" (2014: 68). Can one hence align not only his mixed-race heritage but also his disputed authorial qualities with what I have called the wilful resisting tone of Wedderburn's writing? Wedderburn can be interpreted as a revolutionary modern Black individual or the voice of the masses depending on whether one reads his text as an expression of individual style as an author and storyteller or decodes his narrative simply as an intertextual convolute. Pencek, like Linebaugh and Rediker earlier, clearly favours a reading of Wedderburn as challenging modern conceptions of individuality. He writes: "However memorable the individual Wedderburn may be, in polemical action, his voice becomes the voice, not of a revolutionary, but of the revolution. His anonymity is intolerable because it threatens fundamental assumptions of personal individuality" (Pencek 2014: 74). In terms of the literary voice this seems plausible. However, if we look at the affective politics of the text, it is the very specific family history of Wedderburn that seems to lend *The Horrors of Slavery* moral weight and pushes the text in the direction of (individualised) testimony. Wedderburn's polyphonic account includes standard tropes of sentimentality but moves them in a different, unrespectable direction.

The *Horrors of Slavery* is neither an autobiography, nor a collection of letters. Contrary to Equiano's neatly distributed *Interesting Narrative*, complete with prominent subscribers list, Wedderburn's pamphlet is a messier source to consider: It cannot be linked straightforwardly to sentimentalism or abolitionist tract.<sup>53</sup> The original title page of the text, typeset in a variety of fonts and sizes, which in and of itself is not too remarkable at the time,<sup>54</sup> illustrates the strange generic mix. This text includes the abolitionist tract, "The Horrors of Slavery" exemplified in "the life and history" of the Reverend Robert Wedderburn whose imprisonment in His

Majesty's Goal at Dorchester is boldly advertised, his correspondence to his brother and finally, "remarks on, and illustrations of the treatment of the blacks, and a view of their degraded state, and the disgusting licentiousness of the planters" (HoS 43) (Fig. 4.1).

Comparing this title, for instance, to late eighteenth-century sources like Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain, by Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa* (1999 [1787])<sup>55</sup> and Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (2003 [1789]), Wedderburn's text appears more ambiguous. His "life and history" no longer follows eighteenth-century conventionalised accounts of slavery that humbly (and sentimentally) petition on behalf of the "poor Africans". It demonstrates a more outrageous familiarity with his father and brother, who are identified by name and address. Wedderburn is not an exceptional African; he is the West Indian son of a "Slave-Dealer" and a rebellious preacher who is "disgusted" by the behaviour of the planters, including his father. Hence, the polite detached discourse on abolition is transformed into a more uncomfortable familiarity.

Intervening into the separate spheres of home versus colony, Wedderburn's account is certainly not novelistic in style but can still be regarded in conjunction with the more domestic narratives of its time. His text, which is much more entangled with the transatlantic sphere than Austen's world of little England, becomes an essential counterweight to the assumed silence not on slavery but of the (formerly) enslaved. In post-colonial and feminist criticism, it is not enough to state the symbolical analogies between enslaved people and women. Entanglement here also means to complicate such notions from an intersectional perspective that does not neatly separate gender and race as exclusive categories and that should be understood as a heuristic device to provide a transnational lens on the rise of the British novel. In such an understanding, entanglement becomes a counterweight to the idea that counterpoint is only a retrospective possibility of interpretation. Thus, as laid out in the beginning of the book, by speaking of entangled tonalities I subsume several different ways of relating two sources in the individual chapters. Sometimes, they share a certain sensibility in relation to familial feeling (the foundational tone of modernity in Defoe and Equiano, the digressive mode of Sterne and Sancho's letters that amounts to direct intertextuality and later the humorous and intrusive consolidating tone of Seacole and Dickens's narrators).

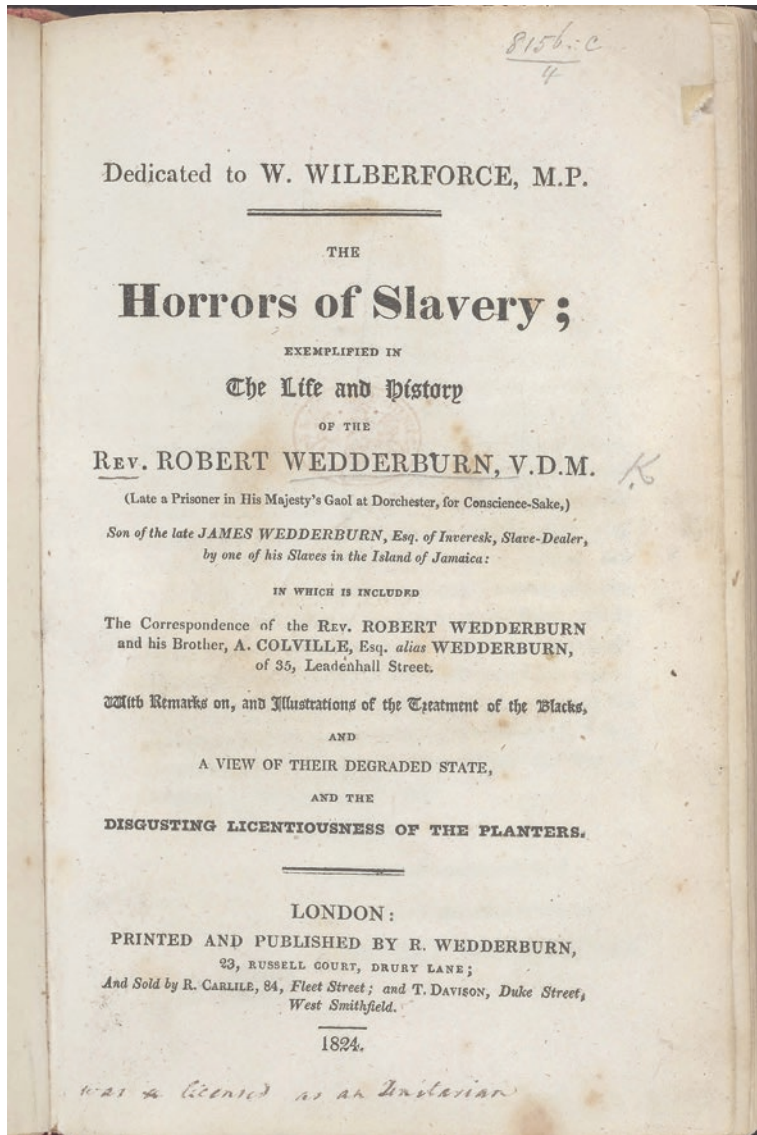


Fig. 4.1 Title Page of Robert Wedderburn's *The Horrors of Slavery* (London, 1824)

In the case of Austen and Wedderburn the connection might appear less obvious. Juxtaposing and bringing into conversation the voices of an unlikely (and potentially unlikeable) white female heroine and a Black male preacher, however, demonstrate that a certain wilful resistance to modes of familial feeling opened new (entangled) tonalities in British prose writing.

Both the *Horrors of Slavery* and *Mansfield Park* deal with resisting family decorum in order to claim subject status. Robert Wedderburn and Fanny Price can be framed as wilful subjects in relation to familial feeling that thus is denaturalised. Despite different generic and aesthetic registers, the pamphlet of Wedderburn and Austen's artful novel can be joined as resisting romanticised notions of familiarity as well as a straightforward binary of radicalness versus complicity in favour of ambivalence: The illicit offspring of a slave and a planter fights for his place in the Scottish family, the "ungrateful" poor relation resists being appropriated into the marriage market but also finds a place in the family. Each in their own way, while they might not please contemporary readers' affective desire for a feminist heroine or a Black infallible revolutionary, Austen's and Wedderburn's texts contribute to an entangled expanding literary representation of familial feeling in the nineteenth century.

## NOTES

1. In the following, quotes from the two primary sources *Mansfield Park* (Austen 2003a [1814]) and *The Horrors of Slavery* (Wedderburn 1991 [1824]) will be abbreviated as MP and HoS respectively in all in-text citations.
2. Additionally, the ongoing military conflict with France in the Napoleonic Wars made a reassessment of Britain's imperial role necessary (cf. Capitani 2002; Tuite 2000: 99–100).
3. Lowe speaks of "the British shift from eighteenth-century mercantilism and colonial slavery toward the new forms of empire that enabled the global expansion of trade in manufactured goods in the nineteenth century" (2015: 69).
4. In contrast to Raymond Williams who speaks of Austen's remarkable "unity of tone" (2016 [1973]: 165, 166), I wish to highlight the contradictions between the tone of the narrator and character-focalizer.
5. In her 1957 introduction to *Mansfield Park*, Queenie Dorothy Leavis, for example, links the plot to the years 1808–1809 (reprinted in Leavis 1983); cf. also Kathryn Sutherland's introduction (in MP xxx); Folsom and

Wiltshire (2014: 5); Lloyd (1999); Southam (1995). Gabrielle White (2006: 30–31) summarises various critics' attempts to assemble a logical internal chronology which they base on the fact that the ball on 22 December takes place on a Thursday and the mention of a following late Easter. These efforts turn out to be relatively futile when trying to match these dates to the references made in the novel to *The Quarterly Review* (only begun in 1809) and another publication of 1812. Hence, while the text invests in a realistic timeline, it becomes nearly impossible to state an exact date other than equating the ending roughly with the present of its contemporary readers.

6. *Mansfield Park* is widely praised for its realistic psychological insights. The book was, for instance, famously described as “the first modern novel in England” by Q.D. Leavis who reads it as foreshadowing the accomplishments of acclaimed novelists George Eliot and Henry James (1983: 167).
7. Mrs Price's family situation is characterised in the following terms in the text: “A large and still increasing family, an husband disabled for active service, but not the less equal to company and good liquor, and a very small income to supply their wants, made her eager to regain the friends she had so carelessly sacrificed” (MP 6).
8. Said states in full: “everything we know about Austen and her values is at odds with the cruelty of slavery” and later: “It would be silly to expect Jane Austen to treat slavery with anything like the passion of an abolitionist or a newly liberated slave. Yet what I have called the rhetoric of blame, so often now employed by subaltern, minority, or disadvantaged voices, attacks her, and others like her, retrospectively, for being white, privileged, insensitive, complicit. Yes, Austen belonged to a slave-owning society, but do we therefore jettison her novels as so many trivial exercises in aesthetic frumpery? Not at all, I would argue, if we take seriously our intellectual and interpretative vocation [...]” (1994: 96).
9. What is more, Wiley critiques postcolonial approaches, in general, and Said, in particular, for focusing too narrowly on the question of representation of the subaltern/native (2014: 64).
10. Wood interprets Austen's evasive references to slavery on the Antiguan plantation even as a conscious reaction to an oversaturated public discourse following the high time of abolitionist and pro-slavery comment predating 1807, reading the silence as possibly resulting from “boredom and overexposure” (2002: 300). While I find this intriguing, I am, for reasons that are hopefully apparent in my reading, less convinced that Austen can be seen solely as a social satirist of the abolitionist fervour.
11. Jon Mee, for instance, speaks of Austen's “female patriotism” (2000: 80) as a shielding against French radicalism.

12. Fraiman (1995: 809), for example, assigns Austen political outsider status on account of her sex as a female author, which Said only accredits to Joseph Conrad due to his Polish heritage (cf. also Wiley 2014). Fraiman discusses the gendered logic of scandalising “gentle Jane’s” connection to slavery in the manifold varied critical reactions to Said’s reading. She accuses Said of a cursory reading of the text, including misidentifying Maria Bertram as “Lydia” at one point (cf. Said 1994: 87) and not paying the same attention to the oeuvre of the author as he does to the texts of the male authors he analyses in *Culture and Imperialism* (Fraiman 1995: 807–808). In the meantime, her own reading has become subject to multiple critical interrogations. Coleman (2009) accuses her of wrongfully attributing the analogy between the “governess-trade” and the slave trade to Jane Fairfax rather than Mrs Elton in *Emma*. The widely cited passage in *Emma* begins with Jane Fairfax admitting that she would seek employment as a governess, phrasing it awkwardly: “‘There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something—Offices for the sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect.’” To which Mrs Elton replies agitatedly: “‘Oh! my dear, human flesh! You quite shock me; if you mean a fling at the slave-trade, I assure you Mr. Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition.’ ‘I did not mean, I was not thinking of the slave-trade,’ replied Jane; ‘governess-trade, I assure you, was all that I had in view; widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; but as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies’” (Austen 2003b [1815]: 279–280). While it is true that the formulation of the “slave-trade” is only used by Mrs Elton, Jane Fairfax’s wording “not quite human flesh” does seem to evoke a similarity to slavery at the very least. This is underlined by the fact that Jane Fairfax, while conscious of the greater guilt in the slave trade, even speculates whether slaves or governesses suffer a more pitiful fate. Here, more explicitly even than in *Mansfield Park*, women’s financially precarious situation is seen as analogous to that of (often conspicuously “ungendered”) slaves, whose capacity to even register misery is construed as only roughly equal to that of refined cultured women who are forced to take on a supposedly demeaning profession.
13. Tuite (2000: 94) helpfully situates the liberal-feminist response to Said’s reading within a larger rift between a more traditional philological understanding of English literary studies and post-/Marxist and postcolonial critique that place different emphasis on text versus context. Cf. also Perry (1994: 100): “Because Said is unable to imagine the dependent status of women, despite his use of terms like ‘gender’ and ‘feminism’, he does not notice that in all the late novels colonialism is associated with women.”
14. Said’s reading was published first in a 1989 essay collection before its revised inclusion in *Culture and Imperialism* in 1993.



15. White's *Jane Austen in the Context of Abolition* (2006) to date provides the most detailed overview of historical texts and possible sources that Austen might have consulted.
16. The following critics link Austen's naming of *Mansfield Park* to Lord Mansfield: Ferguson (1991: 130); Kirkham (1997: 116–117); Lew (1994: 273); Plasa (2000: 34); Steffes (1996: 30); Stewart (1993: 120); White (2006: 5–6); Wiley (2014: 61). Wiltshire (2003: 306) for one finds a reference to the character of Lady Mansfield in Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1972 [1753]), which Austen admired, more plausible.
17. Cf. also Moreland Perkins's essay (2005) in which he reads *Mansfield Park* as an extended analogy of Clarkson's text.
18. Soon Wiley, too, emphasises the violence that is attached not only to the colonial, but also to the domestic sphere: "What Said sees as order, tranquillity and beauty in Mansfield Park, I would call tyranny, cruelty and excessive wealth" (2014: 67).
19. Trevor Lloyd (1999) makes this point by disentangling the family finances in some detail. Fowler (2017), in turn, argues that Said, in fact, underestimates the importance of country houses' colonial connections.
20. I believe Wiltshire's emphasis on postcolonial "obvious misreadings" (2003: 316)—and his entirely misplaced use of the term "decolonising" to describe his attempt to unfetter Austen criticism from such supposedly misguided ideologues—betrays a longing for a restoration of an unambiguous authoritative literary criticism predating any poststructuralist uncertainty, especially should this form of criticism espouse feminist or postcolonial standpoints. Obviously, there is much to be debated about earlier interpretations of the novel, including that of Said, which is what many postcolonial scholars, including myself, do. However, accusing postcolonial criticism *in toto* of trying to fill the blanks in literary texts, in effect, negates the work of literary interpretation to begin with. Even more problematically, in his joint introduction with co-editor Marcia McClintock Folsom for the 2014 *Approaches to Teaching Austen's Mansfield Park*, part of the widely used MLA Approaches to Teaching World Literature series, and despite the admitted necessary inclusion of three articles dealing with the abolitionist context of the novel, their biased view is phrased as a moral call to revert the attention from slavery to more pedagogically suitable topics: "Another question that teachers must weigh is, What other political and social concerns of the novel are displaced or distorted by bringing slavery and the slave trade to the fore of interpretation?" (Folsom and Wiltshire 2014: 33). Again, the authors seem to be implying that it is somehow unrighteous (and pedagogically dangerous?) of teachers of literature to focus on marginalised aspects of a work of fiction since this must necessarily amount to "distortion".



21. Alicia Kerfoot resists a purely metaphorical linking of slavery and women's status in the economy of exchange in her discussion of the biopolitical implications of marriage laws and legislation on slavery reading them as "the same questions of *habeas corpus* as the Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753 and the Mansfield decision of 1772" (2008: 277). While it is true that legally white women still lack a lot of the basic rights that slaves want too—they are legally bound to fathers and husbands—this framing still does not acknowledge the intersectional problems of simply equating race with gender. This framework does not take into consideration the gender of enslaved men and women who are excluded in multiple and conflicting ways in the economy of exchange that Kerfoot describes.
22. Easton's linking of Fanny to both England's working class and the Black Atlantic proletariat, including references to Robert Wedderburn, remains vague: "In the end, the Mansfield property lines that even Mary and Henry uphold are altered by Fanny, whose Portsmouth perspective unites plebian English and black Atlantic values against the modern superintendents of plebian life, whether they are from London or Northamptonshire" (1998: 482).
23. Admittedly, Henry Crawford's ambition is first and foremost "making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart" (MP 212).
24. Mee writes: "In *Mansfield Park*, black slavery functions, like Fanny's gold chain, as a metaphor for female enslavement in Sir Thomas's household" (2000: 85); Carl Plasa similarly argues that Fanny figures "as the slave(s) for who she is herself a kind of living metaphor" (2000: 53). Allen Dunn (1995: 491) frames this more cautiously as service with regard to Fanny's lower-class background: "Fanny's humility and self-mastery make her a willing servant to her aunts, and a dutiful ward and sometimes a dutiful daughter." He also emphasises the lack of feeling between the class-segregated families of Fanny in Portsmouth and Mansfield Park and reads this as one explanation for Fanny's constant emotional indecisiveness (cf. 1995: 495). The analogy between gender and race is also increasingly shifted to an analogy of class and race with descriptions of the "Black" working classes in later Victorian writing (cf. Easton 1998 and the following chapter on Dickens and Seacole).
25. Despite Bartine's and Maguire's insightful discussion of tonal ambivalence, they somewhat problematically conflate the narrator's comment and author intention in their overall judgement of the novel.
26. Despite the lack of direct textual evidence in *Mansfield Park*, Ferguson understands the growing number of free people of colour in the Caribbean as a possible reference point. The much-discussed 1999 British film adaptation written and directed by Patricia Rozema makes this subtext explicit. Critics like Sturrock (2006) and Wiltshire (2003) see this as fundamentally

- flawed and unfaithful to the original source, while others, like, Bartine and Maguire (2010), grant the filmmakers more artistic licence in their interpretation of the text.
27. This, in turn, links the novel to Wedderburn's text, which addresses sexual intemperance of British men in the Caribbean (only alluded to in Austen) much more explicitly. What is more, in an article on two newly discovered letters by Austen's brother Charles, who served in the Royal Navy, Ruth Knezevich and Devoney Looser (2015) speculate about the effects of Charles Austen's familiarity with two mixed-race free women in Barbados who are described as hoteliers and explicitly associated with prostitution. This is an additional connection to Mary Seacole's narrative, who continuously tries to proclaim her distance from such a form of catering to the sexual needs of British seafarers and soldiers. The colonial space is imagined time and again as one of sexual transgressions, in which white men are led astray by (overly sexualised) Caribbean women.
  28. Festa understands this as "Fanny's refusal to alienate herself, either through the theatrical assumption of another character or through the marketing of the self in marriage" (2009: 436).
  29. Wiley also emphasises this novel interest in family upon Sir Thomas's return: "He exhibits more sympathy and tenderness towards Fanny. He also expresses genuine interest in enjoying his familial life and role as a father" (2014: 70).
  30. Makdisi speaks of a conflation of slavery and imperialism in Said (2014: 134).
  31. Cf. Steffes (1996) who discusses the Austen family's own involvement in plantation slavery.
  32. Joanna Aroutian (2006: 231) discusses this in relation to Foucault's well-known framing of the emergence of modern sexuality as a shift from the deployment of alliance to the deployment of sexuality which has been outlined in the introduction in greater detail. Consequently, she reads Maria's eventual divorce resulting from her later elopement with Crawford as the ultimate rebellion.
  33. In relation to Sir Thomas's pushing for Fanny's marriage to Crawford, Jon Mee argues, "genuine family feeling has too often been sacrificed to an ossified sense of duty" (2000: 78). While Mee links Fanny's sincere feeling to her patriotic love of the English countryside, I want to emphasise the disorientation in her emotional responses that shapes the narrative discourse of the novel.
  34. Hence, while Makdisi emphasises the similarities in which colonial subjects and women in the domestic sphere were increasingly exposed to a "civilising mission" that posited an "Occidental discourse of governmentality" (2014: 144) in which internalised self-regulation is the key to a new form

of enlightened liberty, I would caution not to conflate the regulating final narrator summary with the much more ambiguous focalization of the character throughout the story. It seems to me that even though the entanglement of domestic and colonial sphere is immediately plausible, there is a moment of affective distinction at work. The increasingly well-read women in Britain exhibit a form of emotionality that both exemplifies refinement and requires control. This, as Austen's female heroines show, is also hallmark of the novel form and its pleasurable consumption. This affective individuality to a large degree is then still a marker of distinction that privileges both whiteness and femininity. Before self-regulation is achieved, the novel offers ample room to ponder different outcomes.

35. Aroutian argues, "Her brother's presence complicates Fanny's potentially sexual relations by reminding her of her duties toward family via the incest taboo" (2006: 235). In contrast, Kirkham reads this as a critique of the enlightenment ideals of fraternity which need to be established not only between siblings but also between spouses (1997: 119; cf. also Johnson 1988: 117). In a somewhat problematic analogy of "intrafamilial and interracial transgressions", Plasa reads the "inscriptions of incest in Austen's novel" to "assume new meaning: just as the slave is a figurative or metaphorical brother, so the incestuous desire for a literal/biological brother comes to constitute a trope for miscegenation" (2000: 54). This figurative reading of "miscegenation" ignores the actual familial bonds that increasingly extend into the Caribbean as will be argued with regard to Wedderburn and overlooks the more complicated intersections between race and gender.
36. Coleman (2009) also reads this as an enclosing of the familiar in light of colonial expansion and Easton argues, "The bodily fear of external 'infection' [...] and the xenophobic sense of others as 'foreign' [...]—as well as the often noticed endogamy of the novel—are as much about the defence of a property line as a blood line" (1998: 469).
37. Stewart interprets this as a "triumph of the familiar over the alien in a novel that touches so much foreign material" (1993: 127).
38. Focusing on queer temporalities, critics, such as Halberstam (2005), Freeman (2010), and Love (2007), interrogate "straight time" which is reliant on the linearity of a life narrative as maturing, marriage, and procreation, which many queer lives cannot or do not want to adhere to. In this light, Austen's novel is, of course, a prime example of "straight temporality". However, by calling this the "queer temporality of heterosexuality" I want to highlight the artificial work that the temporal closure of the happy ending performs here. In a novel that zooms in on the feeling of the character-focalizer in long scenes to suddenly summarise supposedly natu-

ral developments, using only a fraction of discourse time, can come across as quite queer indeed.

39. Gilroy links Wedderburn's radicalism to his profession as a sailor and the crossing of oceans as an important impulse to challenge national identities (cf. 1993: 12–13).
40. Linebaugh and Rediker explain Jubilee as follows: "A plan for liberation, jubilee appeared both in the Old Testament, as a legal practice of land redistribution, and in the New Testament, as part of the fulfillment of a prophecy in Isaiah. The concept comprised six elements. First, jubilee happened every fifty years. Second, it restored land to its original owners. Third, it canceled debt. Fourth, it freed slaves and bond servants. Fifth, it was a year of fallow. Sixth, it was a year of no work" (2000: 290).
41. The conspicuously unannotated popular biographical publication *The Axe Laid to the Root. The Story of Robert Wedderburn* by Martin Hoyles (2004) also does not challenge the veracity of the supposed (half-)sister and, given its lack of proper documentation, seems a highly speculative source to reconstruct Wedderburn's life story.
42. It is not even entirely clear whether Wedderburn wrote the texts down himself or, due to a lack of command of writing, dictated his texts.
43. Aravamudan (1999: 269) speculates that one of the unnamed texts that Wedderburn received as a gift from Wilberforce might have been Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*.
44. S. Thomas reads this as a direct reference to Equiano's opening paragraph (2014b: 111).
45. McCalman highlights the specific attractiveness of Methodism in this context, because it incorporated still popular magical and pagan-Christian beliefs, which were also prevalent among West Indian communities of colour at the time (1993: 56).
46. Wedderburn time and again adopts the voice of reason, even citing Wilberforce, but, simultaneously, the image of revolt as a consequence of "disappointed hope" is evoked in a plea for amelioration before complete emancipation: "But although we have said we would never cease to exclaim against the horrible traffic in human flesh until there was an amelioration of the condition of Slavery; yet, unjust as is the argument of force against the force of argument, we wished not an *instantaneous* emancipation, although we could have wished our Ministers to have gone farther than they have done, and extended their object to the other Colonies, as they have already commenced it in Trinidad. However, as it is, we rejoice to find that there is a *beginning* to soften the rigour of captivity and fetters; but, as Mr. Wilberforce truly observed, the consequence of disappointed hope might be to drive the Negroes to '*take the cause into their own hands*.' With him, we trust that such may not be the case!" (HoS 57).

47. Discussing a recently discovered anti-abolitionist tract that calls for the compensation of slaveholders which Wedderburn published towards the end of his life, Ryan Hanley cautions against a too narrow understanding of Wedderburn as a political radical, placing this text in the generally complicated debate over authorial authenticity of publications in nineteenth-century radical circles. Thus, Hanley argues, "His adoption of a number of authorial perspectives, tonalities and even characters complicates any reading of his work that seeks to understand it as uncomplicatedly representative of a static political or ethical perspective" (2016: 427). While I will not engage with this new-found source here, I believe that my reading adds to this more ambivalent interpretation of Wedderburn's life and writing that, I argue, is shaped too by his ambivalent familial feelings.
48. James Wedderburn's older brother, Sir John Wedderburn of Ballendean, 6th Baronet of Blackness (1729–1803) (the title was restored eventually), presumably Robert Wedderburn's uncle, was also a prominent landowner in Jamaica. He became famous in his own right when he lost in the Wedderburn versus Knight case of 1778 in which the enslaved Joseph Knight, whom he had brought to Scotland on his return, wins his freedom. The Knight case is considered a direct reaction to, and the Scottish equivalent of, the earlier English Somerset case. The historical novel *Joseph Knight* by James Robertson (2003) is a fictional account of Knight's story.
49. Colville is misspelled as Colville several times in HoS.
50. Colville would later become Proprietor of Canada's Hudson's Bay Company underlining the continuing British colonial global entanglements that eventually turned towards North America rather than the Caribbean.
51. The brutality of the account of the execution of his grandfather is reminiscent of the climactic self-mutilation of the royal slave Oroonoko in Aphra Behn's eponymous novel.
52. This stands in sharp contrast to the plantation system of the United States: Critiquing the conceptualisation of a supposed matriarchal dominance or matrilineality in African American families as a result of the emasculation of Black men under slavery, Hortense Spillers (1987) challenges more radically whether Black women can be understood as gendered human beings under the auspice of enslavement, since they were reduced to a status of "flesh", which via the *partus sequitur ventrem* legislation extended to their offspring. Thus, slavery, in Spiller's understanding excluded enslaved people from the very grammar of gender and familial belonging.
53. Alan Rice reads a published letter sent from prison which includes a fierce attack on the monarchy as Wedderburn's "Swiftian satire" (2012: 164). He emphasises that early Black Atlantic writing in general and Wedderburn's texts in particular point to a broader aesthetic vocabulary than the sentimentalism of abolitionism. He argues, "Wedderburn's anarchist vision and

comic sensibility demonstrate that black voices in the transatlantic literature of this period were not confined to abolitionist discourse. They also drew on the ribald vision exemplified by Swift and graphic satirists like William Hogarth and George and Isaac Cruikshank. A full understanding of African-Atlantic writers and history in this period will require wider reference than the slave narrative which has been sanctioned by the makers of the black canon" (2012: 166). While I do not engage with the more satirical letters here, I similarly want to highlight the "tonal" range of Wedderburn that moves beyond the familiar sentimentalism of abolitionist writing and yet does not entirely let go of the promise of familiarity.

54. Regarding a different letter by Wedderburn, Sue Thomas interprets the use of mixed typography, such as italics, capitalisation, and the usage of exclamation marks, as a form of "emphatic editorialization" that can be linked to the Jamaican oral tradition of "tracing" or "throwing word", a form of personal attack (2014b: 109).
55. The title is altered in an abridged 1791 version, published as *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery; or, the Nature of Servitude as Admitted by the Law of God, Compared to the Modern Slavery of the Africans in the West-Indies; In an Answer to the Advocates for Slavery and Oppression. Addressed to the Sons of Africa, by a Native*. The later title also imagines an entangled audience of the advocates of slavery and the "sons of Africa".

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## CHAPTER 5

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# Consolidations: Dickens and Seacole

Novels can consolidate a sense of belonging and community by introducing readers to a world that appears comfortable and familiar, inhabited by literary characters that feel “like family”.<sup>1</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, print publications have become an established market commodity that has produced a new class of professional authors, who expanded their influence through serial publications in magazines and public readings. Charles Dickens was at the very forefront of these developments.<sup>2</sup> Dickens, probably like no other writer before him, made a success of creating such simultaneously broad and relatable figures that bolster the concept of familial feeling and that readers keep returning to fondly to this day. He is at once quintessentially British and one of the first international Anglophone literary bestsellers. Accordingly, the national public sphere is now more than ever intimately tied to a fast-growing transatlantic literary market. Dickens’s writing oscillates between a fascination with travel in the increasingly global empire and the safe return to the British home. While his long and highly prolific literary career was shaped by an interest in overseas territories, he had little personal experience of the empire, as Grace Moore (2004: 1) argues. Instead of trying to reconstruct Dickens’s views on empire and race throughout his oeuvre, as Moore does, I will, in the following, concentrate on his travelogue *American Notes* as well as on the topic of philanthropy in *Bleak House*.<sup>3</sup> This shows that for Dickens, maybe unexpectedly, his travels to the United States consolidated a

narrower national understanding of sympathy, as expressed in his “reformist novel” (cf. Claybaugh 2007) *Bleak House*.

Travelling nurse Mary Seacole also claims a “homely” version of Britishness. Often referred to as the “Black Florence Nightingale”, the Jamaican-born Seacole went on a voyage to the Crimea during the war (1854–1856) to take care of British soldiers and rose to considerable fame during her lifetime. In contrast to Dickens, and somewhat paradoxically, she is most successful in her claim to Britishness when she is at the front rather than on the British Isles. It is her eagerness to parade a familiar maternal image abroad that consolidates her version of Black/Creole Britishness which simultaneously boosts national morale and underlines British imperial ambitions. Seacole, whose account is considered one of the earliest first-person narratives of a female Black British subject, understands the literary marketplace as a possible arena for financial compensation for her physical and affective labours. This includes strategically laughing off the racism she encounters. Reading Dickens’s texts together with Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures* as my final couple of entangled tonalities shows a crucial shift in mid-nineteenth-century literature which consolidates British imperialism via “enlightened” differentiation from the Americas and culminates in the more paternalistic rhetoric following the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion.<sup>4</sup>

Preceding these events and immediately following abolition, Britain’s global economic and colonial entanglements had shifted away from its lost colony and the West Indies, which were now of decreasing financial importance, to new territories both in Asia and in Africa. Nevertheless, the young United States was, of course, still part of the transatlantic public sphere which, most importantly, shared reading audiences via the English language. With the eventual British outlawing of slavery in its territories in 1833 (taking effect in 1834), US-American abolitionists who still engaged in the struggle against enslavement sought moral support from the “mother country” of old.<sup>5</sup> So, while the territory of British colonial investments grows, the topic of (American) slavery does not disappear altogether. On the contrary, Victorian writers now frame slavery as that US-American aberration which Britain has long overcome.<sup>6</sup> This form of British moral exceptionalism that Christopher Brown (2006), as mentioned, describes as “moral capital”, is paradoxically understood as an enlightened form of imperialism, which Swaminathan calls a “new ethics of empire” (2009: 212).<sup>7</sup>

Both Dickens and Seacole are implicated in these shifts in the literary marketplace, the British renunciation of slavery, and its concomitant growing imperial ambitions. They try to profit from the transatlantic public sphere by evoking a national form of familial feeling. While travelling they construct conciliatory images of home that do not overtly challenge the sensibilities of the British audience. Moreover, with the growing reading public, different genres of prose writing are becoming more established with the travelogue and the novel as popular forms that should be read as part of the rise of the novel phenomenon that, as I have argued, cannot be limited to fictional texts.<sup>8</sup> In addition to more formulaic sensation novels, repetitive narrative patterns and endings are also becoming outmoded by the demands of readers for more complex realist verisimilitude. Both Dickens and Seacole's texts sit somewhat uneasily in relation to realist conventions of storytelling with Dickens at times wavering between documenting and sentimentalising and Seacole liberally editing out unwanted details. Nevertheless, both display a self-assured and assuring attitude in their narrators and narrative personae. In her travel account, Seacole utilises a confident tone often directly addressing her readers more familiarly than the Black authors before her. She strategically scandalises "Yankee" racism while British prejudice is downplayed. Moreover, she tones down any overtly sexual references in her "adventures". Dickens too uses excessive overt narrative comment to promote an idea of a shared sense of indignation at lacking American manners in his travelogue and at the misguided international philanthropy of Mrs Jellyby in *Bleak House*. Thus, "fa(r)ther from home", in Dickens we can detect a paternalistic narrative voice that seems to espouse a nationalistic conception of reform, which in his fictional writing is expressed in a tension between sentimentalism and realism. Seacole's Black Victorian maternity, as "(m)Other of the nation", in turn, promotes a humorous portrayal of a potential "Other" (global and imperial) Britishness. Both their consolidating tonalities rest less on complex introspection than on an explicit reassuring British familiarity. However, while Dickens increasingly understands British familial feeling as tied to whiteness, Seacole contests such racialised conceptions of national belonging.

FA(R)THER FROM HOME: CHARLES DICKENS'S *AMERICAN*  
*NOTES AND BLEAK HOUSE*

In 1842, Charles Dickens spent six months travelling the United States, which for many British authors had become a popular destination. To put it in familial terms, they were curious about the fate of the rebellious offspring of the former colony. While there is a feeling of familiarity not least through the shared English language, gradually, the independent young nation is also perceived as different, in manners, in pronunciation, and in its political outlook. The 1840s are a particularly interesting period in which the consensus in the British public sphere had shifted towards a general condemnation of slavery while the United States remained deeply divided on the issue until after the Civil War. This makes for an uneasy transatlantic bond. In the States, Dickens is initially welcomed as a literary hero with large audiences greeting him and back in England, he quickly publishes his travel account as *American Notes for General Circulation* in the same year. The subtitle, “for general circulation”, was an obvious allusion to the lack of international copyright that made cheap unauthorised editions of British books very popular in the United States at the time and a great concern to authors like him. Accordingly, and to the dismay of the American press, Dickens used his journey for public speeches campaigning for stricter copyrights. Dickens’s ambivalent desire to be liked and at the same time not to hold back with critique shapes the tone of the text. Dickens professes that he does not want to upset his readers in the United States—after all a (potentially growing) paying public—but also succumbs to the British convention voiced in travelogues of the time which harshly criticised (the lack of) American manners (cf. Mulvey 1990). His text should therefore be regarded as part of a larger transnational public sphere, as Amanda Claybaugh explains:

Dickens’s tour participated in some Anglo-American networks (suffrage and anti-slavery reform) while attempting to regulate another (the literary marketplace). But his travel book shows that social reform and the literary marketplace cannot be separated so easily. (2006: 440)

On occasion, Dickens admiringly describes US-American citizens, institutions, and surroundings, and, at other times, he includes longish, quite defensive comments in relation to what might cause offence in his remarks

showing the delicate entanglements between the transatlantic networks of reform and literature that Claybaugh mentions.

In the very beginning of the journey, Dickens keeps referring to himself in the third person in full as “Charles Dickens, Esquire” (AN 9) and it seems as if the lack of distance between his private person and the public literary persona and narrator was causing him difficulty in finding the right tone, especially when he was both openly lauded and attacked. The concluding remarks, thus somewhat unconvincingly, try to appease his diverse reading publics by stating:

There are many passages in this book, where I have been at some pains to resist the temptation of troubling my readers with my own deductions and conclusions; preferring that they should judge for themselves, from such premises as I have laid before them. My only object in the outset, was, to carry them with me faithfully wheresoever I went, and that task I have discharged. But I may be pardoned, if on such a theme as the general character of the American people, and the general character of their social system, as presented to a stranger’s eyes, I desire to express my own opinions in a few words, before I bring these volumes to a close. (AN 266)

Dickens claims to be an objective witness. Nonetheless, he also insists that he is entitled to his own point of view. Part of this paradoxical assessment, of course, has to do with the perspective of the travelling Englishman explaining the foreign territory and the “general character of the American people” to his compatriots.

One of the most striking experiences of difference in the navigation of public space for Dickens is the unfamiliar greater visibility of non-white people. While British lines of differentiation relied on social stratification and a marginalised servant class, the United States had established a strict system of race segregation which feels alien to Dickens when he describes boarding a train leaving Boston.

There are no first and second class carriages as with us; but there is a gentleman’s car and a ladies’ car: the main distinction between which is that in the first, everybody smokes; and in the second, nobody does. As a black man never travels with a white one, there is also a negro car [...]. The conductor or check-taker, or guard, or whatever he may be, wears no uniform. He walks up and down the car [...]; or enters into conversation with the passengers about him. [...] Everybody talks to you, or to anybody else who hits his fancy. (AN 72–73)



While racial segregation is strict, the gendered separation of the cars is not exclusive as in “the ladies’ car, there are a great many gentlemen who have ladies with them” (AN 72) and Dickens is also surprised that women travel alone. As in Seacole’s case, this form of unaccompanied female mobility is eyed with great suspicion by the Victorian.<sup>9</sup> The general impression that is communicated throughout is a shocking lack of social etiquette. Dickens scolds Americans for their over-familiarity and is appalled by the “offensive and sickening” practice of spitting chewing tobacco everywhere in public, even by senators (AN 125, 137). On the train, Dickens is annoyed by the conductor who interrogates him, “as his fancy dictates” in what he perceives as intrusive questioning, the wrong pronunciation of English, and, most importantly, a disregard for his “place”.<sup>10</sup> Being addressed without the proper decorum by the working people “below” him comes as an unpleasant surprise to the prim Englishman.<sup>11</sup>

During his journey Dickens is certainly guilty of a paternalistic tone<sup>12</sup> but he also seeks consolidation by complimenting his American hosts profusely at times. Given his interest in social reform, he follows the example of other English authors before him to visit, for instance, a Boston school for blind children (The Perkins Institution, whose description is partly taken verbatim from their Annual Report), a hospital for the “insane”, several prisons, and factories. He notes positively what “will startle a large class of readers on this side of the Atlantic” (AN 78), namely, that the female workers in one of the factories have access to a piano, a circulating library, and even publish their own periodical. Dickens comments favourably on the democratising function of literature across “station” and is clearly supportive of crossing barriers of class when the direction is one of “uplift”. The lack of manners, on the other hand, is what he perceives as one of the many “degrading” ills of democracy. Dickens’s views are therefore often ambivalent, generally distrusting the “Chartist mob”, at times demanding individual responsibility but also calling for solidarity with the working class.

However impressed Dickens seems with some of the progressive causes in the States, slavery, “that most hideous blot and foul disgrace” (AN 34), remains the one topic that he cannot dismiss as simply an American “peculiarity”.<sup>13</sup> For him, there can be no reconciliation with the service by people who are “purchased”, and he describes his first encounter with being waited on (something he would be more than familiar with) as a feeling of “shame and self-reproach” because of his awareness of the enslavement of the servers:

We stopped to dine at Baltimore, and being now in Maryland, were waited on, for the first time, by slaves. The sensation of exacting any service from human creatures who are bought and sold, and being, for the time, a party as it were to their condition, is not an enviable one. The institution exists, perhaps, in its least repulsive and most mitigated form in such a town as this; but it *is* slavery; and though I was, with respect to it, an innocent man, its presence filled me with a sense of shame and self-reproach. (AN 127)

Afterwards, Dickens decides to cut his scheduled journey short and consequently his personal observations at this stage are limited to his admitted but “innocent” complicity with what he perceives as a “mitigated form” of slavery. He muses:

I had at first intended going South—to Charleston. But when I came to consider the length of time which this journey would occupy, and the premature heat of the season, which even at Washington had been often very trying; and weighed moreover, in my own mind, the pain of living in the constant contemplation of slavery, against the more than doubtful chances of my ever seeing it, in the time I had to spare, stripped of the disguises in which it would certainly be dressed, and so adding any item to the host of facts already heaped together on the subject; I began to listen to old whisperings which had often been present to me at home in England, when I little thought of ever being here; and to dream again of cities growing up, like palaces in fairy tales, among the wilds and forests of the west. (AN 140–141)

In this quote, Dickens gives several reasons for his altered itinerary: the long duration of the journey, the suffocating weather, but also the fact that he is now of the opinion that any contact with slavery he could procure, would be shielded from the “ugly” truth, as, in fact, happens during his following failed attempt to visit the slave quarters on a plantation in Virginia. Instead he conjures up his boyish dream of America as the fairy-tale “wild west”, as that innocent landscape (devoid of any connotations of settler violence against the indigenous inhabitants), which he used to indulge in back “at home in England”. Interestingly then, Dickens doubts his capacity to become a meaningful witness in the fight against slavery and instead relies on print culture as a form of verification. In addition to his wavering narrator comments, we thus also find the (often uncredited) inclusion of other authors’ materials in his travelogue. At first sight this must appear counter-intuitive given Dickens’s own campaign for stricter

copyright. Therefore, before dealing with the rest of his journey, I first discuss the final chapter before the “Concluding Remarks” which was simply entitled “Slavery” and caused far-reaching controversy.<sup>14</sup>

In this strangely isolated chapter in the text, Dickens takes additional space to condemn the “atrocities” of the system of chattel slavery. He refutes American claims that most slave owners treat their slaves well and who argue that “it is not so bad, as you in England take it to be” (AN 251).<sup>15</sup> The majority of this information is taken from *American Slavery As It Is*, a 1839 publication by Theodore D. Welt for the Anti-Slavery Society (cf. Brattin 2015; Claybaugh 2007: 75–76). Dickens, for instance, copies a comprehensive list of several pages of advertisements for runaway slaves from the abolitionist text into his own account. However, rather than understand this simply as unauthorised piracy, Giulia Fabi speaks of Dickens’s “documentary strategy” in this context:

Intended as identikits to recover lost property, these advertisements are “dialogized” with the abolitionist context of Dickens’ argumentation and they become polemical tools to undermine the right to own human property, as Dickens sheds the light of irony on the contradictions between the words of the upholders of slavery and the “pictures” of the slaves that are “drawn ... by their own truthful masters.” (1997: 128)

In contrast to his own restricted glimpses at the realities of slavery, Dickens trusts in the written word, which, as Fabi emphasises, paradoxically garners even more credibility coming from the slave owners themselves. Dickens, in including these materials into his narrative, characteristically combines an emotionalising with a documentary impulse. This has a different effect than the (fictional) eighteenth-century sentimental accounts of the “poor African”. Against their original purpose to recapture the enslaved (and as Dickens notes appalled, often unashamedly listing the full names and addresses of the slave owners who have committed these atrocities), these advertisements are used by the abolitionists as testimony on the injustice against individual people who almost all can be identified by name.<sup>16</sup> All beginning with “Ran away”, they are: “Caroline”, “Betsy”, “Manuel”, “Fanny”, “a negro boy about twelve years old”, “Hown” and “Grise, *his wife*”, a “boy named James”, “John”, “Myra”, “a negro woman and two children”, “Henry”, “Pompey”, “a negro man”, “Rachel”, “Sam”, “Dennis”, “Simon”, “Arthur”, “Isaac”, “Mary”, “Ben”, “Tom”, “Ned”, “Josiah”, “Edward”, “Ellie”, “Randal”, “Bob”, “Kentucky Tom”,

“Anthony”, “Jim Blake”, “Maria”, “Mary”, “Fountain”, “Jim”, “John”, “a negro man”, “Mary”, “Judy”, “Levi”, “Washington”, “John”, “Sally”, “Joe Dennis”, “Jack”, and “Ivory” (AN 255–257). Their bodies are described as bearing the marks and scars of the severe physical harm committed against them. This list, Dickens is sure, will sicken and repel his readers (AN 258). He continues by providing a further range of clippings from American newspapers that he collected during his journey and which attest to the ubiquity of violence and crime that Dickens attributes directly to the fact that “the character of the parties concerned was formed in slave districts, and brutalised by slave customs” (AN 258). Once more the “horror” of slavery relates not only to the violence against Black bodies but includes the shocking revelation that it is supposedly “civilised” white people who commit these deeds and who are thus understood to be equally “brutalised” by the system. Dickens is not sentimentalising the fate of one particularly innocent nameless victim (remember Sterne’s “poor negro girl”) and the fact that he lists several pages of such gruesome descriptions also does not amount simply to a reproduction of “spectacular” scenes of violence (as the infamous scenes of murder and suicide in Behn’s much earlier *Oroonoko*, for instance). Paradoxically, his “plagiarising” and incorporation of other sources can be considered part of an authenticating strategy here. Furthermore, Claybaugh (2007: 75) understands Dickens’s reproduction of abolitionist publications as a strategy to “defamiliarize” slavery: Southern newspapers that complain about abolitionist propaganda “constitute a public sphere that has been deformed by a too-familiar violence” (2007: 78). Again, the problem then is not only the harm done to Black people, it is also the degrading effect that the familiarity with slavery has on white Americans. What is more, in “defamiliarizing” American atrocities, Dickens’s text also consolidates ideas of British superiority.

Like Seacole after him, Dickens condemns American slavery but often repeats racist prejudice himself. It is obvious that he is both fascinated and repulsed by the, for him certainly unfamiliar, quotidian sight of Black people. In his own travels this becomes apparent in his continued journey through Virginia which is related at the beginning of the second volume of the travelogue. There he describes his “very black” driver in his formal yet patched dress as an “insane imitation of an English coachman!” (AN 148). Dickens dwells on the unfamiliar pronunciation of the man and his supposedly affected gesturing “like a harlequin, rolling his eyes” (AN 150). At this point, similar to his earlier sketches and typical of travel

writing in general, Dickens is happy to share his impressions of generic (and at the same time intriguingly Other) characters. So, while the system of chattel slavery deeply disturbs him, he also seems hesitant to accept African Americans as anything comparable to civilised Englishmen (or capable of the propriety of English service). Not only Black authors then are belittled for their “imitative art”, even the capacity of Black slaves/servants to procure the “proper social decorum” is negated as “insane imitation”. Additionally, Dickens often places African Americans in the literal or figurative dehumanising vicinity of animals, as with the naked “negro children” rolling around “with dogs and pigs” (AN 151) and the Black drivers who are “chattering [...] like so many monkeys” (AN 147). Thus, although his inclusion of abolitionist materials in the slavery chapter follows a more factual logic, his own perceptions are tainted by preconception. Dickens also falls prey to the temptation to employ an overtly sentimentalising tone, for instance, when he witnesses how a mother is sold off without the father of her children. This scene is described in the sentimental phrasing “the mother was misery’s picture” (AN 151). In this instance, Dickens appears more interested in “collecting her picture” as part of his affecting representation, with the severing of family bonds as a long-established sentimental trope of condemning slavery, than her actual fate.<sup>17</sup>

Given the myopia of the traveller, Dickens can only detect fault in the foreign culture that he visits. For him, it is no contradiction to look down upon Black people and yet call out the “horrible institution” that the supposed American champions “of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” (AN 151) uphold. On the one hand, Dickens almost mocks American pride in their Declaration of Independence; on the other hand, he also tries to be a gracious guest when he praises the owner of the plantation who will not let him inspect the slave dwellings in person as a “considerate and excellent master” and “a kind-hearted, worthy man” (AN 153). At times then, Dickens seems to doubt the authority of his own narrative voice, maybe because of the identification of it with his public persona.<sup>18</sup> The tone of *American Notes* therefore rather than successfully consolidating his various reading audiences seems to sit uneasily in the transatlantic sphere with many American readers offended, penning angered critiques. As a result, Dickens thought it necessary to comment in several pre- and postscripts<sup>19</sup> on his travelogue and its complicated reception. In general, the disgruntled author seems most successful in appealing to the sentiments of his readers on his home ground. During his travels Dickens

gradually comes to realise that while there is still a transatlantic bond between Britain and the United States, it does not amount to a shared structure of “familial feeling” any longer.

In her comprehensive analysis of Dickens’s references to Native Americans in his writing (which like his descriptions of African Americans are equally problematic<sup>20</sup>), Kate Flint (2000: 99) emphasises that instead of envisioning Native Americans as childlike “noble savages”, it is in fact the independent United States that are infantilised as the “degenerate child” of the Great Fathers of the Revolution in *American Notes* (AN 269). Dickens demonstrates a nineteenth-century ambivalence that condemned slavery as unnatural but was increasingly embracing civilisational gradations in human “races” that would elevate Europeans to the status of “natural” leaders in a “progressive logic” that easily reconciled ideas of reform with imperial expansion. The United States instead of being raised to this higher status are in danger of being pulled down by their holding on to the “backward” idea of slavery. Accordingly, Dickens criticises the American incapacity to produce a genuinely “healthy” tone of public debate in their national print culture.

In this way, he can also return to the “unprotected” status of American literature in his concluding remarks—again a nod to the unresolved copy-rights issue that irks him. It is the “object state” of public discourse that has a direct impact on what Dickens describes as the “tone of public feeling”:

while the newspaper press of America is in, or near, its present abject state, high moral improvement in that country, is hopeless. Year by year, it must and will go back; year by year, the tone of public feeling must sink lower down [...]. (AN 269)

The lowly status of the American media thus leads to the current “degenerate” state of the American nation. Cultural refinement requires that public feeling be expressed in the right tone. While Dickens is certain that the United States currently does not live up to the high standard of British morals, it is interesting to note that he himself evidently also struggled to envision the right tone for a transatlantic form of familial feeling. Consequently, *American Notes* is also the herald of a paradoxical recluse of Dickens. The more mobile he was and the more transnational his reading public became, the more nationalistic his idealised version of the home seems to have become. This influenced his conception of reform in his

following novels. For Dickens, as Claybaugh contends, “the withdrawal to the nation was what enabled reform” (2007: 84). Ultimately, the home, in the capitalised well-worn nod to the dear English “Home” that defies representation, is acknowledged in the last lines of the travelogue as the true destination of every traveller: “winding up with Home and all that makes it dear: no tongue can tell, or pen of mine describe” (AN 249).<sup>21</sup> “Fa(r)ther from home”, Dickens thus romanticises a domestic version of Englishness. Subsequently, Dickens’s growing distrust in transnational networks of reform becomes most obvious in his mockery of Mrs Jellyby in *Bleak House* with feeling, familiarity, and notions of belonging reimagined as hard-fought for and contested resources.

Published as a series from 1852 to 1853, *Bleak House* is a vast portrait of England’s social grievances. In close to a thousand pages Dickens starts off with what reads like a family novel that increasingly turns into a detective story. In his preface Dickens famously states, “In *Bleak House*, I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things” (BH 7). It is the plight of the poor at home, the “dark continent” of urban London, rather than the actual African continent that he is concerned with.<sup>22</sup> In the following, I am not going to offer a general reading of the novel but rather concentrate on the idealised conceptions of motherhood and the infamous idea of “Telescopic Philanthropy”, the title of chapter twenty. The misguided humanitarian Mrs Jellyby fails to acknowledge the misery in front of her doorstep but invests all her energy into her missionary work for Africa, which amounts to time-consuming letter writing and fundraising. This has been linked to the ill-fated attempts in exploring the Niger region in 1841 (cf. Carens 2005: 87–95; Teukolsky 2009), a context that many contemporary readers would still be familiar with.

From the moment the novel’s protagonist and part narrator, Esther Summerson, enters the house of the Jellybys she is shocked by the deplorable state of the many children and shabby surroundings. Mr Jellyby seems to have resigned completely to the rule of his wife and in that sense also fails as the Victorian head of the family. The domestic shortcomings of the Jellybys are directly resulting from the continuous prioritising of “Africa” and Mr Jellyby’s silence is characterised as non-English, pushing him in the vicinity with “natives”: “As he never spoke a word, he might have been a native, but for his complexion” (BH 57). The oldest daughter Caddy, who confides in Esther, is miserable being exploited as her mother’s secretary. Her destiny is tainted, her face and skin literally stained by the ink that she constantly uses to write her mother’s letters endangering her

whiteness (cf. BH 53). Caddy imagines herself time and again as “enslaved” by her mother and her philanthropic projects. Interestingly, the slogan of the earlier abolitionist movement has survived and is now reemployed in the Christian proselytisation of Africa, which makes for strange bedfellows of colonialist expansion and humanitarian claims.<sup>23</sup> At one point, Caddy bursts out, “Talk of Africa! I couldn’t be worse off if I was a what’s-his-name—man and a brother!” (BH 217) and she later adds that she will not remain a slave for the rest of her life, stressing that she will not marry a philanthropist (cf. BH 219). Her “enslavement” to the African cause has turned her into a—tellingly male—“man and a brother” and thus also robs her of the ability to embody proper femininity.<sup>24</sup> After feeling embarrassed by the dirt and lack of decorum in front of Esther during her first visit, Caddy decides to “be improved in that respect” (BH 220) by learning to dance. This is also where she meets her future husband, the pretentious dance teacher Prince Turveydrop whose family embodies the “deportment”, so lacking in the Jellyby home.

When Caddy finally announces her plans of getting married in front of her parents, her mother reproaches her with the following accusation: “a degenerate child, when you might have devoted yourself to the great public measure” (BH 383). It is only with the help of angelic Esther that Caddy can finally “emancipate” herself from her tyrannical mother and eventually get married.<sup>25</sup> Paradoxically then, in the novel’s logic, a woman’s freedom can be found only in matrimony and not in her engagement in public service. From Mrs Jellyby’s ridiculed point of view, this decision against professional duty is “degenerate”. This confirms the limited vision of female freedom in *Bleak House*. Contrary to the familial scheming to “sell” women off on the “marriage market” that is criticised in Jane Austen’s novels, Mrs Jellyby shows too little interest in her daughter’s domestic success, which also ends in the family’s financial ruin (cf. Cain 2008: 145). Unlike other female Victorian heroines, Caddy Jellyby displays no interest in a role that would challenge the image of the angel *in* the house.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the reference to the Wedgwood medallion and the already mentioned “native” disarray of the Jellyby household, *Bleak House* also partakes in the common strategy to superimpose race with class. The dirty slum inhabitant in London is portrayed as literally “blackened” which is why Timothy Carens speaks of an “Africanization of England” (2008: 42) in this context. But instead of dwelling on industry and



urbanisation at greater length, the neglect of the urban poor in the novel is primarily related to conceptions of failed motherhood:

In *Bleak House*, the responsibility for contaminating the nation with versions of “the black figure” shifts from captains of industry who exploit their workers to middle-class “mothers of England” who neglect their proper duties. (Carens 2008: 41)

Indeed, the reference to English “black figures” had served as a means to play off reform and abolition against each other for a long time already. What is new in Dickens, however, is a distrust in increasingly specialised networks of transnational philanthropy in which more and more women actively participated. By now, eighteenth-century sentimentalism has morphed into professionalised philanthropy that is not the expression of noble goodwill of the aristocracy but middle-class duty.

In his transnational study of the relationship between US-American and British philanthropy and fiction, Frank Christianson writes, “the rise of modern philanthropy corresponds with the period in the 1840s and 1850s when an identifiable professional class emerged in Britain and the US” (2007: 4). Dickens is highly critical of any form of over-regulation (embodied obviously in the ineffectual Chancery Court in the novel).<sup>27</sup> Thus, while he is confident about British civilisational supremacy, he vehemently disparages ineffectual management and a morally reprehensible short-sightedness of “the imperial gaze, the philanthropic gaze, [and] the missionary gaze” (Chennells 2000: 164). For Dickens, the domestic sphere is where effectual reform would begin. In this context, D.A. Miller speaks of the “faultiness of the family” (1983: 83) as a symptom of this failed philanthropy in *Bleak House*. By highlighting shortcomings of familial care, Dickens, Miller argues, strengthens normative conceptions of domesticity. This is connected to

the utilitarianism that Dickens’s sentimentality about the family rationalizes rather than resists. The novels continually imply the family’s advantages over other agencies in producing acceptable citizens of the liberal state both in quantitative terms as its greater economy—and in qualitative ones as the superiority of the bonds between its members. (Miller 1983: 83)

Miller concludes, “Dickens’s vigorous reformism makes better sense as an undeclared defense of the status quo” (1983: 84). In other words,

Dickens's perspective is one of disentanglement. The nuclear family rather than the state is the locus of true affection and sympathy. Geographically, he recentres London as the starting and ending point of all transnational endeavours (cf. Chennells 2000: 159). Nevertheless, he does not entirely let go of imperial ambitions either. While the Jellyby family is clearly a sign of a corrupted gendered order, men can and should engage in England's colonial missions.<sup>28</sup> It is specifically mothers like Mrs Jellyby who are at fault and who should take care of the "home front" (cf. Carens 2005: 104–112).

The climax of this lack of the right kind of familial feeling then is the sentimentalised depiction of street urchin Jo, who is not so lucky as to profit from the attention of wealthy middle-class ladies and perishes miserably. He is characterised as follows:

he is not one of Mrs Jellyby's lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets [...]. (BH 724)

This narrator description is interesting because it implies that familiarity and closeness in effect prevent fellow-feeling. The unpleasant vicinity to suffering is harder to bear than the supposedly more thrilling adventurous philanthropic projects overseas. Moore argues that Dickens "inverts the dominant discourse by emphasizing Jo's essential 'homeliness' at the same time as registering the paradoxical otherness that renders him a race apart" (2004: 31). Physical closeness is no longer enough to stimulate familial feeling, in fact, it is dangerous as the theme of contagion and Esther's disfigurement as a result of her illness underline.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, with the idea of telescoping philanthropy dismissed, *Bleak House* resorts to a narrower conception of "natural" sympathy that in Dickens's texts often rests on actual familial recognition (in *Bleak House*, for example, between Esther and her mother Lady Dedlock). Nancy Yousef argues,

Deftly brought together in these scenes of filial recognition are the sentimental hypothesis that natural benevolence is both rooted in and evinced by the affective bonds of family and the Humean idea of sympathy arising from the remarkable resemblance between human beings. [...] Dickens also evokes the idea of similitude as the basis for mutual recognition. (2009: 64)

In relation to Jo this means that he is radically excluded from this community of familiar objects of “natural benevolence” because of dissimilitude from middle-classness (cf. Yousef 2009: 69). Yousef, however, does not regard this as a shortcoming of Dickens’s sentimental scenes but rather understands this as an appeal to reflect on the limits of compassion, a “rendering visible of the overlooked” (2009: 71). In contrast, I would argue, Dickens resorts to a comfortably domestic interrogation of the limits of sympathy. While any sympathy with “natives” or “Africans” is satirically derided, Jo’s exclusion in terms of class can be sentimentalised within a larger idealised notion of a yet insufficient national familial feeling of Britishness that is thus also imagined as exclusively white. In contrast to Seacole’s more mobile version of Britishness that is inclusive of Blackness, the symbolical Blackness of Jo, is a smudge on his white homeliness. Similarly, Saree Makdisi emphasises that his Blackness is essentially a marker of differentiation: “Ironically, in other words, rather than collapsing London into Africa, what enables the narrator of *Bleak House* to compare Jo with an African savage is exactly that there is—or ought to be—a sense of difference between the two spaces, the domestic and the foreign” (2014: 200).

This finally brings me more explicitly to the question of tone once more. While Yousef reads Dickens’s sentimental scenes as a philosophical challenge to sympathy, they also bear the danger of stifling more radical social criticism. The use of overt narrator comment often provides descriptions of flat character types (as opposed to psychologically complex interiority), especially in the shifts from Esther’s voice to the heterodiegetic narrator. Jo’s death is recounted by a highly intrusive narrator admonishing the readers across all stations of society: “Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us, every day” (BH 734). In her introduction to *Bleak House*, Nicola Bradbury singles out this passage as emblematic of the novel’s “rhetorical contradictions [...] [which], divided between unmediated feeling and audience manipulation, correspond to the ambivalence which fissures and energizes the whole text” (in BH xxxiii). While Dickens seems more assured of the authority of the narrator’s voice here than in the travelogue, his writing too was criticised for its wavering between earnest social critique and lacking verisimilitude that audiences were expecting of the increasingly realist novel form (regarding the famous spontaneous combustion in *Bleak House*, for instance).

Christianson argues that Dickens is aware of these tensions within literary realism and stresses the relevance of the preface once more as a place where Dickens would attempt to reassert authorial control. “Many novels in the period employed the move of using an author’s preface to defend or verify the probability if not actuality of certain plot points and testify more generally to the ‘truthfulness’ of the work” (2007: 83).

Thus, neither overtly sentimental scenes nor the humorous satire of the Jellybys is seen as contradicting the impulse of truthfulness. Quite the opposite. Christianson sees “Dickens’s satiric treatment of philanthropy [...] not [as] an end in itself; rather, its intention is purgative, to rescue philanthropy from the instrumentalising influence of other modern institutions” (2007: 87). As a novelist Dickens succeeds in weaving together different narrators, different modes, ranging from the satirical to the sentimental, combining the family novel with the suspense of detective fiction that builds on reader anticipation. Accordingly, Miller describes the novel’s overall structure in the following terms. It is

the compositional principles of discontinuity and delay that organize the form from within its own structure: not only in the formal breaks of chapters, installments, volumes, but also in the substantive shifts from this plot-line to that, or from one point of view or narration to another; and generally in the shrewd administration of suspense that keeps the novel always tending toward a denouement that is continually being withheld. (Miller 1983: 76)

The combination of suspense and sentimentalism is conciliatory because the readers know that Dickens will weave everything together. Following Miller, it is paradoxically the multiplicity of narrative styles and voices that shapes Dickens’s consolidating tonality in *Bleak House*. Both in terms of content and form, Dickens secures a cosy version of domestic Britishness, in which maternal incompetence can often be compensated by benevolent older male characters like Mr Jarndyce. He relies on a “benevolent paternalism” (Moore 2004: 37) as an ordering principle that is sympathetic to the plight of the poor who are excluded from the realm of the familiar and, despite being critical of systemic failures, keeps more dangerous radical ideas that would endanger the middle-class status quo (voiced for instance by the Chartists) at a safe distance.

To summarise, looking at *American Notes* and *Bleak House* together one can detect that the increasingly transnational public sphere creates a new form of “compassion competition”. The plight of the poor in Britain

is contrasted with the missionary zeal in Africa that is superimposed with abolitionist discourse (cf. Teukolsky 2009: 491). The dedication of white women to the abolition of slavery and missionary work in Africa is linked to idealised notions of motherhood in this transatlantic triangle of Britain, Africa, and the United States. As Gabriele Dietze (2013) has argued in a comprehensive genealogy of how race and gender emancipation projects in the United States have been shaped from the beginning as being in an analogous *and* antagonistic relation to each other, there is wide-reaching competition in the increasing demands for universal suffrage at the end of the nineteenth century. Hence, it can come as no surprise when the reader learns that Mrs Jellyby eventually turns to the “woman question” and suffragettes following the disappointing failure of her missionary project (cf. BH 987). In the depiction of the Victorian mother Jellyby, both political ambitions remain indicators of her deviance. The British debate on women’s suffrage only really gains momentum in 1870, the year Dickens dies, and the first unsuccessful Women’s Suffrage Bill is introduced to parliament. Dickens’s holding on to idealised conceptions of motherhood shows the intricate links between national belonging and gender conformity. While Dickens was clearly in favour of the abolition of slavery during his lifetime, he seems to have been far less convinced of the need to reform the Victorian family ideal. Mary Seacole on the surface, too, seems to uphold these middle-class morals but underneath her heroic motherly persona lurks a more dangerous mobile mixed-race femininity.

### (M)OTHER OF THE NATION: MARY SEACOLE’S *WONDERFUL ADVENTURES*

Following her self-appointed mission in the Crimean War, Mary Seacole found herself in financial difficulties back in Britain. Consequently, she is encouraged to write an autobiography, published by James Blackwood in July 1857 as the *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*. The book sold very well—how well exactly, however, has come under some scrutiny. Helen Rappaport (2005) mentions “only” a second edition and sees Seacole’s eventual return to Jamaica in 1859 as a sign that the book was not such a great success after all and that her fame lasted only for two brief years until her travelogue was eventually rediscovered in 1984 (and republished in 2005).<sup>30</sup> Seacole did, however, travel to London once more where she died and was buried in 1881.

Before the Crimean War, Seacole stayed in England only for shorter periods of time that are hardly mentioned in her text—which, as the title suggests, focuses on her “wonderful adventures in many lands”, including Panama, Turkey, and Russia. Seacole thus claims the colonial term “adventure”, defined by Green as “a series of events, partly but not wholly accidental, in settings remote from the domestic and probably from the civilised” (1980: 23). Her narration of voluntary travel marks her as distinct from the earlier transatlantic writers whose journeys were still intimately tied to the forced passage of the “horrors” of slavery. Setting out from the periphery of the empire to claim such adventures was thus not only uncommon for a woman, especially a woman of colour, it was also highly unusual in terms of the direction of her crossing the Atlantic. Cheryl Fish emphasises the “popularity of the travelogue, a genre with episodic discourse that tends to blur boundaries between truth and fiction, the fantastic and the mundane, and has as its center the construction of a self whose wandering gaze uses the other as a mirror” (1997: 479). This form of construction of the self against an Other appears abundantly clear in Dickens’s *American Notes* but obviously plays out differently in Seacole’s navigation of complicated territories of national belonging which also affect the structure of the text.

Generically Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures* is ambiguous. It is not a novel; but it is also not strictly an autobiography or straightforward travelogue. Despite being an autodiegetic text, *Wonderful Adventures* includes strong dialogical features (as explained in greater detail in relation to Bakhtin in Chap. 2) that undermine the often-assumed narrative coherence of life writing. Seacole admits to “unhistorical inexactness” (WA 128) that stands in stark contrast to the realistic documentary impulse of Robinson Crusoe’s fictional autobiographical account but might thus be in fact more truthful of how human memory works:

I have attempted, without any consideration of dates, to give my readers some idea of my life in the Crimea. I am fully aware that I have jumbled up events strangely, talking in the same page, and even sentence, of events which occurred at different times; but I have three excuses to offer for my unhistorical inexactness. In the first place, my memory is far from trustworthy, and I kept no written diary; in the second place, the reader must have had more than enough of journals and chronicles of Crimean life [...]; and in the third place, unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all. (WA 128)

Since the travelogue in general and the Crimean War journal specifically are at this point already well-established (or, as implied, even worn out) forms, Seacole proposes a somewhat more unusual style of telling her story. Seacole mixes elements of the traditional male genre of adventure writing and the picaresque (with its focus on travel across space and social landscape) with verifying strategies of the autobiography by including newspaper articles and letters that testify on her behalf in her project of recognition. This continual referencing of official British praise can be interpreted as part of her dialogical strategy here.<sup>31</sup> While Seacole is moving from station to station, her implied reading community is wooed in her allegiance to Britain, similar to Sancho's embrace of British culture in his letters.

However, unlike Sancho's displayed literary ambitions as a "man of feeling", Seacole is not so eager to prove her literary merit. Literary references are attributed explicitly to the unnamed editor W.J.S.<sup>32</sup> Seacole's account builds its fascination entirely on the unlikeliness and idiosyncrasies of its protagonist. By admitting to the limits of her literary knowledge and her many direct addresses to the readers she establishes a much more confidential tone than Dickens's often-times admonishing paternalism in his travelogue. Seacole fashions herself as an eccentric storyteller and a practical maternal healer and she boldly proclaims, "I shall make no excuse to my readers for giving them a pretty full history of my struggles to become a Crimean *heroine*!" (WA 71). The mobility of war and British global exploits, it seems, become a way for her to inscribe herself into the English national body—and overcome obstacles of racism. Thus, while she does not claim literary authority, her account does partake in narrative constructions of familial feelings of Britishness. Simon Gikandi emphasises that "Englishness is an identity [that] must [be] claim[ed] through gestures of writing and reinvention" (1996: 128), and on the level of Seacole's narrated journey to gain British approval, this certainly holds true.

Seacole's narrative identity construction and the interpretation of her text rely on complex racialised, gendered, and classed norms. But as her narrative demonstrates, such identity categorisations often stand in an affective and indissoluble relationship rather than a matrix of clear-cut intersecting binary categories. Seacole is an example of living "in and out of Englishness", as Gikandi (1996: 126) calls it, and it is an uncomfortable position that includes Black self-authorisation by collusion with the imperial enterprise. This entails most notably the strategic citation of correct gender conventions and an overt belief in the capitalist/militarist British

nation state. Gikandi critically remarks that Seacole thereby reproduces the “master narrative of mid-Victorian Englishness”. He argues:

her narration of Englishness is predicated on an archetypal mid-nineteenth-century trope—what Williams calls “the new bourgeois ethic of self-making and self-help.” The act of writing the self is configured as the establishment, by the colonial subject, of its own discursive space within the master narrative of mid-Victorian Englishness. Seacole clearly emplaces herself in this narrative by valorizing its defining codes—individualism, moral restraint, and public duty. Thus while the title of Seacole’s narrative might seem to celebrate the romance of adventure, the meaning of her travel is secured by its larger moral purpose—the self-advancement of the subject and her (public) sense of moral good. (Gikandi 1996: 132)

Consequently, almost all critical responses to her writing address the dilemma of how Seacole’s narrative can be understood within a postcolonial framework since her affirmative attitude regarding hegemonic Englishness has caused unease.<sup>33</sup> Despite the widely held “postcolonial consensus” that Britishness (as well as Englishness) is not a stable identity, the interpretations of Seacole’s *Adventures* repeatedly stress her writing herself *into* (or as Gikandi has it, “in and out” of) Englishness (in contrast to the later postcolonial paradigm of “writing back” to the centre). As with the earlier Black Atlantic authors, I find it helpful to stress her entanglement in transnational imaginations of Britishness. Therefore, in the following, I am not only interested in the ways in which the colonial subject seeks approval as a means to become legible within metropolitan culture or how in mimicking the English she produces subversive “slippage” (Bhabha 1994: 122), destabilising the notion of a coherent colonial identity (which she undoubtedly does), I also want to enquire into the emotional appeal of the British investment in Seacole’s war narrative in the nineteenth century and in Seacole as a historical example of Black Britishness today.

There is an ongoing tendency to stress the exclusion of marginalised subjects from Britishness, thereby reinforcing the notion of a homogeneous English national body that can exceptionally “absorb strangers”. Of course, there is a hegemonic valorisation of whiteness that marks racialised people as “outsiders”. But the hegemonic centre does not exist as a stable entity into which the marginalised seek entrance. It is rather through the inclusion of colonial subjects like Seacole, underlined, for instance,



through the verve with which the military officials saluted the Black nurse and her connections to the Royal family, that a notion of an inclusive British identity is consolidated. As highlighted repeatedly, part of this progressive identity is the supposedly more enlightened response to slavery in comparison to the United States. The British public can embrace abolitionism and at the same time invest in new forms of global free trade that also help consolidate British interests in the Caribbean. The period following (British) abolition is thus a historical juncture that makes a certain flexibility of the norm necessary. Sandra Gunning insightfully mentions the impact of transnational mobility on class and gender ideologies for “*both Seacole and her British audience*” (2001: 952) and stresses the “politics of adaptability” that subjects like Seacole seem to inhabit. This renders possible a pluralisation of positionalities regarding race and class—which acquire local and conflicting meanings—in the various settings of Seacole’s narrative.

To begin with, Seacole needs to be abroad in order to consolidate her Britishness. There she can claim allegiance with the “mother country” by proving that Britain’s Others are Other to her as well. Nonetheless, Seacole is, of course, aware of her assumed mostly white British readership, and dialogicity (which could also be understood as an intratextual expression of entanglement) does not necessitate equality between different voices. Seacole repeatedly addresses the readers directly in the conventionalised appeal to the “sympathizing reader”/“kind reader” as part of her consolidating tonality.<sup>34</sup> Thereby, she constructs familiarity which the text claims quite literally through the construction of kinship. The intimate character of her account is also due to a conversational tone. However, Innes (cf. 2002: 131) emphasises that even though Seacole’s narrative style can be associated with orality, her speech is always represented as standard English in contrast to the non-standard idiom of Americans (and later Irish or Cockney characters). What is more, in her case, this form of familiarity is not an unquestioned given, as in Dickens. Dallmann speaks of Seacole’s attempt of drawing her readers “into a complicity with the texts autobiographical persona” (2012: 437).

Seacole’s account opens with the customary autobiographical details: “I was born in the town of Kingston, in the Island of Jamaica, some time in the present century. [...] I am a Creole, and have good Scotch blood coursing in my veins” (WA 11).<sup>35</sup> The contemporary term “Creole” that she prefers as a self-identification means in the broadest sense “of Caribbean descent” and is not necessarily connected to “race”. Her father was a white

Scottish soldier and her mother a Jamaican freewoman and healer (possibly mixed-race herself). Her gender and widowed status are aspects that *Mrs* Seacole, who, in accordance with conventions of female vanity in these issues likes to keep her exact age a secret, stresses. But apart from that, she hardly mentions her marriage. Mr Seacole is referred to only very briefly. Seacole recounts how she apparently could not find the courage “to say ‘no’ to a certain arrangement” (WA 14) and agrees to marry him; in the same paragraph his failing health and death are briefly reported. In this way, specific moments in the narrative are accelerated, that is, a short segment of the narrative discourse is devoted to a long period of the story. The mixed-race marriages both in Seacole and other Black British authors like Equiano become such notable accelerations. By being hardly mentioned they are inserted into the story, but possibly meant to slip the reader’s attention or at least not to draw too much attention. While these kinds of marriages were never illegal in Britain or Jamaica, they were certainly not broadly approved of at that period.<sup>36</sup>

After her mother’s death, Seacole is left without her most important family members and travels back and forth between Jamaica and London. In this way, she begins her quest as a travelling woman, “an unprotected female” who had to deal with “the pressing candidates for the late Mr Seacole’s shoes” (WA 16). But she steadfastly resists remarrying as she is building a new identity for herself as a successful nurse—a profession she learned from her mother. She calls herself a “yellow” woman or “yellow doctress” (WA 38) and is determined to make her way by establishing her first British Hotel in Cruces, Panama, to provide maternal hospitality. The “family” as a structure of feeling, based on heteronormative gender norms, is consciously cited by marginalised subjects such as Seacole at a time when the nation state and the family are constructed as increasingly mutually dependent spheres of identity formation. “[L]odging herself within the privileged private seat of familial affection and sentiment” (Poon 2008: 50), Seacole must perform a specific feminine and motherly identity as a traveller that highlights her service to the nation. She continuously stresses how the grateful British soldiers eventually call her “Mother Seacole” in the Crimea. She transforms herself in what Paravisini-Gebert calls a “consciously articulated reconstruction” (2003: 73). She gradually achieves an—in the admittedly somewhat worn-out wordplay of the title of this section—overlaying of Other with Mother.

Along her journey, her complexion is, of course, no small obstacle. Nonetheless, Seacole herself liberally voices many of the British racial

prejudices (both negative and positive) and thereby enhances a feeling of familiarity with her reading audience. Seacole employs a black servant, Mac, and a cook, Francis (whose hair she describes as “wool” (WA 103)); she talks about an acquaintance as “Jew Johnny” (WA 84) (and in the Crimea, Greeks and Turks were addressed generically as Johnny by the British) and calls a Turkish officer “Captain Ali Baba” (WA 97). Her own encounters with racism however are downplayed emotionally, once more accelerated in the story, and often combined with humour or distancing narrative techniques.

Racists are almost always US Americans (whom she often calls “Yankees”) rather than British—except for the often-cited London episode in which she recalls her first visit to the capital:

I shall never forget my first impressions of London. [...] Strangely enough, some of the most vivid of my recollections are the efforts of the London street-boys to poke fun at my and my companion’s complexion. I am only a little brown—a few shades duskier than the brunettes whom you all admire so much; but my companion was very dark, and a fair (if I can apply the term to her) subject for their rude wit. (WA 13)

Racism is a strange recollection and a street-boys’ joke—and she even includes a pun about her companion’s complexion. Here, Sara Ahmed’s work on the politics of emotion is helpful:

Racism is a pain that is hard to bear. Consciousness of racism becomes retrospective, and the question of timing does matter. You learn not to see racism as a way of bearing the pain. (Ahmed 2010: 43)

Seacole makes herself British by stopping to feel interpellated by racism—this is a retrospective act that finds expression in her memoir. She takes the negative and hurtful affect and turns it into a piece of writing which works to uphold and support the British military and nation state and grants her emotional inclusion into a community.<sup>37</sup> Seacole elides racism as a misappellation: it is an American misnomer of her British identity, as the following quote demonstrates:

[M]y experience of travel had not failed to teach me that Americans (even from the Northern States) are always uncomfortable in the company of coloured people, and very often show this feeling in stronger ways than by sour looks and rude words. I think, if I have a little prejudice against our

cousins across the Atlantic—and I do confess to a little—it is not unreasonable. I have a few shades of deeper brown upon my skin which shows me related—and I am proud of the relationship—to those poor mortals whom you once held enslaved, and whose bodies America still owns. And having this bond, and knowing what slavery is; having seen with my eyes and heard with my ears proof positive enough of its horrors—let others affect to doubt them if they will—is it surprising that I should be somewhat impatient of the airs of superiority which many Americans have endeavoured to assume over me? (WA 20–21)

The vocabulary of family ties is striking here. Seacole has never been enslaved, but there is a distant kinship in her African heritage that connects her to African American slaves. Moreover, in the same quote she also calls American slaveholders “our distant cousins” which includes her in the group of the British.<sup>38</sup> This shows Seacole’s at least tripartite identification as what one today would probably call Afro-Caribbean Britishness. However, this inclusion is only possible because Britishness is no longer associated with chattel slavery. The earlier inclusive version of a British “our” is momentarily displaced when she mentions “those poor mortals whom *you* once held enslaved, and whose bodies America still owns”. This exclusive British “you” is an acknowledgement of an anachronistic notion of Britishness and its involvement in enslavement. Accordingly, in the present, her anger can be directed entirely at the Americans.

Seacole also recounts how in Panama the Americans celebrate Independence Day and one of the drunken men toasts her declaring: “that Providence made her a yaller woman. I calculate, gentlemen, you’re all as vexed as I am that she’s not wholly white—, but I du [sic] reckon on your rejoicing with me that she’s so many shades removed from being entirely black—; and I guess, if we could bleach her by any means we would—[...] I give you Aunty Seacole!” (WA 49). “Aunty Seacole”—a relative after all—who takes care of the soldiers, needs to be whitened in the American logic. But Seacole is strongly offended by this condescending “offer”:

[...] I must say, that I don’t altogether appreciate your friend’s kind wishes with respect to my complexion. If it had been as dark as any nigger’s, I should have been just as happy and as useful, and as much respected by those whose respect I value; and as to his offer of bleaching me, I should, even if it were practicable, decline it without any thanks. [...] I drink to you and the general reformation of American manners. (WA 49)

Again, these instances relating to racism and slavery are not scandalised—she carefully qualifies her dislike of American manners as her “prejudice” and even reclaims the offensive n-word as preferable to the condescending idea of her being “bleached”. While there are parallels to Dickens’s scolding of lacking manners (and bad pronunciation, as represented in the direct speech), one must bear in mind that Seacole is not on US territory. Consequently, in contrast to Dickens’s more diplomatic remarks regarding his Southern hosts, Seacole finds herself in a more comfortable place to voice her critique of slavery.

Central America is an interesting and highly conflicted landscape at the time of the gold rush as Caribbean descendants of the enslaved, runaway American slaves, the British, and white Americans meet.<sup>39</sup> These forms of new mobility also influence gendered conventions. Seacole disapprovingly mentions the women who wear male attire thereby causing a certain degree of gender trouble in addition to the racial tensions in Panama (cf. Romero-Cesareo 2001). While she is sure not to be conflated with “those French lady writers”<sup>40</sup> (WA 26) and always emphasises her proper feminine attire—and as an author of an autobiography she is, of course, claiming white *and* male privilege—these masculine women also bear a certain fascination for Seacole:

the female companions of the successful gold-diggers appeared in no hurry to resume the dress or obligations of their sex. Many were clothed as men were, in flannel shirt and boots; rode their mules in unfeminine fashion, but with much ease and courage; and in their conversation successfully rivalled the coarseness of their lords. I think, on the whole, that those French lady writers who desire to enjoy the privileges of man, with the irresponsibility of the other sex, would have been delighted with the disciples who were carrying their principles into practice in the streets of Cruces. (WA 26)

Gender, race, and sexuality (with heterosexuality always endangered by the spectre of female masculinity) are interrelated here. The white female traveller, situated between different national contexts, can assume familial and gender liberties that other women cannot.<sup>41</sup> Seacole, in contrast, needs (and is eager) to display proper femininity. The “Yankees”, and the masculine women in particular, become her foil against which she can imagine herself and become readable as a refined British subject and embodiment of femininity (cf. also Innes 2002: 134).

It is specifically the “disagreeable” ladies from the Southern United States who are the recipients of her aloof indignation, and who, in Gorgona, are more reliant on her goodwill than she is on theirs:

Indeed, the females who crossed my path were about as unpleasant specimens of the fair sex as one could well wish to avoid. With very few exceptions, those who were not bad were very disagreeable, and as the majority came from the Southern States of America, and showed an instinctive repugnance against any one whose countenance claimed for her kindred with their slaves, my position was far from a pleasant one. Not that it ever gave me any annoyance; they were glad of my stores and comforts, I made money out of their wants; nor do I think our bond of connection was ever closer; only this, if any of them came to me sick and suffering (I say this out of simple justice to myself), I forgot everything, except that she was my sister, and that it was my duty to help her. (WA 51)

Seacole heroically overlooks their small-minded “repugnance” at her complexion, which is “kindred with their slaves”, to demonstrate at once her smart capitalist spirit but also emphasising her humanitarian duties as a healer and their “sister” in the face of illness. On her journey back from the island Gorgona, she suffers yet another “instance of American politeness” (WA 55) when two American women refuse to travel on the same boat with her and her servant girl, Mary, at whom they hurl verbal abuse and Seacole spares the British no details of the American insolence: “I cannot help it if I shock my readers; but the *truth* is, that one positively spat in poor little Mary’s frightened yellow face” (WA 56). Seacole is forced to leave the American ship and board the next British vessel that takes her back to Jamaica. The space of the British ship emotionally links her two “homes”. Racism thus in her narrative becomes a strange “recollection” that, while present in Britain too, is often confined to the space of the Americas.

When in 1854 the conflict in the Crimea eventually breaks out, it becomes a global news item in the transatlantic public sphere. In this context Rupprecht emphasises the “cultural history of globalisation” with the “technologised spectacle” of the Crimean War inhabiting a central role in transnational communication (2006: 200). Already the emergence of modern imperial nation states is thus much more globalised than contemporary accounts often acknowledge. The war is accompanied by a new form of immediate correspondence which reported the widespread

mismanagement and inadequate medical provisions for the troops (Dickens also followed these accounts which fuelled his anger at incompetent bureaucracy). It also turns into an opportunity for Seacole. Paradoxically then, it is the military conflict far away from the British Isles that finally is her chance to demonstrate her belonging to the “mother country” and Seacole can cement her role as mother to the British soldiers, to “be useful to my own ‘sons,’ suffering for a cause it was so glorious to fight and bleed for” (WA 71). Initially, British authorities reject “the offer of a motherly yellow woman to go to the Crimea and nurse her ‘sons’ there” (WA 72). Seacole appears quite understanding at first, but is intrigued when she is not accepted as an official nurse: “Was it possible that American prejudices against colour had some root here?” (WA 73). Quite strategically again, British racism does not really count and continues to be referred to diminutively as “American prejudices”. Hawthorne argues that “Seacole conducts this questioning of Victorian racial fairness through an intimate dialogue with her reader” (2000: 320). In contrast to Dickens then, who also posits British superior manners, Seacole has to remind her Victorian readers to actually live up to this ideal.

Eventually, she opens her own independent second “British Hotel” and here “Florence Nightingale enters Seacole’s text both as the ‘real’ presence and as a ‘site’ that Seacole cannot inhabit” (Paravisini-Gebert 2003: 76).<sup>42</sup> In the Crimea, she has to face her white mirror image Nightingale. And while she is sure not to deny Nightingale’s achievements, she also tries to position herself as possibly the better war hero who works much closer to the trenches. Gunning (2001: 973–974) understands this as a tactic of bonding with the working-class soldiers’ wives who accompanied the regiment and were also excluded from the traditional image of the neat white feminine middle-class nurse. On the one hand, the British middle-class reading public is challenged regarding the limits of inclusiveness, on the other, the colonial relation is described, once more, as “familial and affective; not shaped by racism” (Salih 2004: 183). The relationship between the older Black woman and the younger white British soldiers is marked as maternal throughout: they are “her sons”, she is their “mami”.<sup>43</sup> In the Crimea, Salih concludes, “maternity and militarism seem entirely compatible” (2004: 184).

However, there is one episode in the sick wharf of Balaclava in which Seacole recounts how a dying soldier mistakes her for his wife and squeezes her hand (cf. WA 89), and this is the only mention of a possibly illegitimate touch. Gunning emphasises a difference here between the

“desexualized U.S. image of the black mammy” (2001: 954) and the role of surrogate mother, sister, and wife that Seacole performs who would also evoke the stereotype of the Caribbean mix-raced “hotelkeeper welcoming male attention” (2001: 971). Seacole refutes this stereotype by emphasizing her “service to the brave British army” as “doctress, nurse, and ‘mother’” (WA 110). In these instances, her displayed narrative sexual naiveté consolidates her respectability (cf. Dallmann 2012: 434). McMahon explains: “Paradoxically, discursive maternity desexualizes Seacole even while emphasizing her femaleness, lending respectability to her presence among the many men with whom she constructs long-standing, intimate, but discursive bonds of kinship” (2008: 191). Motherhood becomes the perfect vessel of claiming a caring version of familial feeling in which Seacole is not considered Other and yet does not embody the threat of too intimate interracial sexuality.

Following the unsatisfactory resolution of the military conflict and the insight that peace would cause her financial ruin, Seacole decides to travel for a bit in Russia before her eventual return. Here she is presented as an English lady before the Russians and she remarks, “I wonder if they thought they all had my complexion” (WA 161). In the Crimea at least, she has finally fully entered the British family which finds its amusing climax when the soldiers try to pass her off as the Queen or at least a cousin of the monarch.

My companions were young and full of fun, and tried hard to persuade the Russians that I was Queen Victoria, by paying me the most absurd reverence. When this failed they fell back a little, and declared that I was the Queen’s first cousin. (WA 162)

In this context, Angelia Poon considers the role of humour and irony in Seacole’s failure to perform a proper English body and stresses performative aspects of Seacole’s adoption of an English identity. While the distancing function of humour does indeed shape the narrative and its consolidating tone, especially in relation to the attenuation of racism, I do not think that the vocabulary of theatre and “playful performance” (Poon 2008: 73) is very helpful here. In her attempt to create an affective mode of belonging to the British family, Seacole’s identity construction is neither voluntary play, nor simply a joke. It is also important not to mistake Seacole as a colonial subject caught in “false consciousness” or naïve philanthropy. She is an entrepreneur who managed to make the disdained



occupation of the “sutler”, who was accused of taking financial advantage of military conflict, into a “noble profession” as the special correspondent of *The Times* William Howard Russell confirms in his opening note “To the Reader”, which is included in the text.

Despite Seacole’s eventual financial losses, there is a spirit of capitalism here that is based on emotional ties. After all, she *sells* the British goods to the soldiers to make them *feel* at home. Similar to Dickens’s travelogue, the “English home” is also an important reference point in her narrative:

Don’t you think, reader, if you were lying, with parched lips and fading appetite, thousands of miles from mother, wife, or sister, loathing the rough food by your side, and thinking regretfully of that English home where nothing that could minister to your great need would be left untried—don’t you think that you would welcome the familiar figure of the stout lady whose bony horse has just pulled up at the door of your hut, and whose panniers contain some cooling drink, a little broth, some homely cake, or a dish of jelly or blanc-mange [...].

I tell you, reader, I have seen many a bold fellow’s eyes moisten at such a season, when a woman’s voice and a woman’s care have brought to their minds recollections of those happy English homes which some of them never saw again; but many did, who will remember their woman-comrade upon the bleak and barren heights before Sebastopol.

Then their calling me “mother” was not, I think, altogether unmeaning. I used to fancy that there was something homely in the word; and, reader, you cannot think how dear to them was the smallest thing that reminded them of home. (WA 111–112)

In the many repetitions of the word “home” and interjections addressing the reader, Seacole describes herself as a “familiar figure” and “woman-comrade” once more emphasising her maternal role.<sup>44</sup> She not only makes up for the official shortcomings of the nation in taking care of its soldiers, she can also procure specific English culinary delights that are reminiscent of domestic nostalgia. Amy Robinson links this cashing in on familial sentimentality to the rise of consumerism and calls Seacole a “surrogate ‘mother’” and “a substitute object for the white ‘Mother’” (1994: 548). Thus, motherly care increasingly is also not simply a “natural” given, it is closely intertwined with capitalism.

Nicole Fluhr regards this as an instance in which the supposedly separate gendered spheres of familial care and capitalist profit can no longer be neatly divided.

Seacole did not charge for her nursing, but she was paid for food and the medicines she stocked or, in many instances, prepared herself. Because Seacole labels this work “maternal,” mothering appears in *Wonderful Adventures* as public labor—or rather, as labor that bridges the divide between public and private. (2006: 105)

As a travelling woman of colour Seacole intervenes into idealised versions of Victorian femininity that Dickens imagines as safely restricted to the space of the home. And while Gunning and Robinson argue that Seacole becomes a substitute for white motherhood, McMahon claims that Seacole literally embodies the ideal of English femininity that needs to be protected by projecting herself at the centre of the British family (cf. McMahon 2008: 191). She argues,

Seacole invokes both the emotional needs of the troops and the cultural construction of “home” as sacred space, as the very reason for which nations go to war. In doing so, she is able not merely to align herself with the women left in England, but literally to embody English femininity and to stand as a symbol of the home, hearth, and empire for which England was supposedly fighting. (McMahon 2008: 189)

In contrast to Dickens’s resistance to accept familiarity across physical differences, Seacole underscores time and again that the soldiers fully accept her as family. Comparable to Dickens, Seacole posits maternal care as a familial alternative to inefficient bureaucracy, but unlike him, “Seacole thus makes patriotic national identity and the domestic characteristics that comprise English motherhood into traits accessible to both whites and nonwhites” (Om 2014: 86).

Seacole ends her account with her return to England as a poor woman and closes her “egotistical remarks” (WA 170) with reference to the “Seacole fund” that was established by a number of high-ranking military men to aid her. The publication of “Seacole’s documentary deference to the newly envisioned military thus played directly to the cultural imaginaries that helped to shape dominant metropolitan interpretations of the Crimean War” (Rupprecht 2006: 195). Seacole’s narrative functions at the interstices of establishing Britain as an enlightened colonial power that has refuted the “horrors” of slavery and moves into a new phase of imperialism. The docile colonial subject who is an ally in this transition becomes a welcome fantasy to emotionally invest in. At this moment in time, to

support Seacole was a sign of British solidarity and national pride. As mentioned, her book is published in 1857, the year of the so-called Indian Mutiny/Sepoy Rebellion, which led to the establishment of direct rule over India as a colony, after all.

In response to news of the “Mutiny” and according to reporting in *The Times*, Seacole had planned to continue her loyal service to the Crown and wanted to support the British army once more in India. But these plans never panned out (cf. J. Robinson 2005: 179–180). This probably most traumatic event in the history of the empire deflects from the Americas and gestures to yet another colonial Other, namely the “ungrateful rebellious Oriental Other” in India.<sup>45</sup> The so-called Sepoy Mutiny also seems to have aroused a more conformist response from Dickens. Moore writes, “between 1854 and 1857 his [Dickens’s] view of the state of the nation had become entangled with his anger at overseas crises, firstly in the Crimea and, more dramatically, in India in 1857” (2004: 3). Both Seacole and Dickens are thus entangled in their consolidating tonality that is shaped by public disdain for American slavery and growing support for the British empire.<sup>46</sup>

The metaphorical British family extends into the various regions of empire and therefore the Mutiny is regarded as a treacherous act *within* the family. The rebellious “children” must now be placed under imperial/parental supervision. Keith Booker explains that, rather paradoxically, the British nostalgia for “innocent rule” justified the establishment of more colonial control.<sup>47</sup> In this context the inclusion of Seacole into the realms of the family also means that the Black woman nurses Britain’s hegemonic self-understanding post-Mutiny. Nevertheless, the endorsement of Seacole can also be understood as at least testing British notions of homogeneity. Home and empire are interrelated, and Gunning argues that the “voluntary servitude” by colonial subjects such as Seacole also highlights the feebleness of the mostly male English Caribbean colonial rulers who appear “constitutionally incompatible with their West Indian empire” (2001: 962).

Seacole and her willingness to travel to India is also a reference point for Anthony Trollope who mentions having met her sister in Jamaica in his 1859 travelogue *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*. This goes to show that white authors were keen to demonstrate their worldliness by discussing their encounters with those few Black people who might be familiar to a larger British reading audience. Trollope writes,

I took up my abode at Blundle Hall, and found that the landlady in whose custody I had placed myself was a sister of good Mrs. Seacole. "My sister wanted to go to India," said my landlady, "with the army, you know. But Queen Victoria would not let her; her life was too precious." So that Mrs. Seacole is a prophet, even in her own country.

Much cannot be said for the West Indian hotels in general. By far the best that I met was at Cien Fuegos, in Cuba. This one, kept by Mrs. Seacole's sister, was not worse, if not much better, than the average. It was clean, and reasonable as to its charges. I used to wish that the patriotic lady who kept it could be induced to abandon the idea that beefsteaks and onions, and bread and cheese and beer composed the only diet proper for an Englishman. But it is to be remarked all through the island that the people are fond of English dishes, and that they despise, or affect to despise, their own productions. They will give you ox-tail soup when turtle would be much cheaper. Roast beef and beefsteaks are found at almost every meal. An immense deal of beer is consumed. When yams, avocado pears, the mountain cabbage, plaintains [sic], and twenty other delicious vegetables may be had for the gathering, people will insist on eating bad English potatoes; and the desire for English pickles is quite a passion. This is one phase of that Jove for England which is so predominant a charatceristic [sic] of the white inhabitants of the West Indies. (1859: 21)

In his generally condescending and often racist remarks towards the inhabitants of the Caribbean, Trollope repeatedly mocks women, but when confronted with Seacole and her sister, he is at a loss. "Good Mrs. Seacole" has become sacrosanct, "a prophet, even in her own country". Instead Trollope resorts to criticising Seacole's sister's wrong assumption about English culinary preferences. Englishness is created in travelling abroad, but the colonial presence has already manifested itself in preconceived notions on what Englishness actually entails. Seacole and her sister assume as natural a knowledge of English mores, as travellers like Trollope assume "natural" superiority. Familiarity in some ways becomes the wedge between hierarchies of self and Other that become less clear-cut as Black women become English war heroines and white inhabitants of the West Indies insist on "on eating bad English potatoes".<sup>48</sup> In the colonial encounter there is an entangled affective relationship at work (which is not to say that there are no imbalances in power).

In the famous *Punch* cartoon Seacole is depicted as standing at the bedside of an invalid soldier, holding up a copy of *Punch* (Fig. 5.1).



Fig. 5.1 Cartoon depicting Mary Seacole in *Punch* (London, 30 May 1857)

The white soldier reaches out to hold on to the hand of the Black nurse, and the heading reads: “Our Own Vivandière”. The British are in need of a colonial subject such as Seacole, she is their “own”. There is gain in claiming Seacole for England. Yet, the contemporary letters in *The Times* (reprinted in WA 173–177) still read her predominantly as a “Creole” or “Jamaican” rather than as a British woman. As Russell states in his opening note “I trust that England will not forget one who nursed her sick” (WA 5). While there is a dependency on her consolidating skills, she is still not entirely part of that community. In this sense, Amy Robinson (1994), who stresses Seacole’s exceptional status, is right. But I would add that it is exactly the movement in a direction of inclusion of Seacole that caters to

Britain's notion of its own exceptionalism (and this form of exceptionalism becomes a defining feature of modern national identity that needs to be consolidated in a demarcation of Others). Seacole is not only an extraordinary case of Black Britishness, she is also an important signifier for the inclusiveness of the British. The attention to Seacole by her contemporaries underlines the empire's need to be approved of by those it ruled to cement the myth of "just rule". It seems that it is those subjects who still lend themselves most favourably to contemporary constructions of Black British history.

There are at least three waves in the reception of Mary Seacole. Following the Crimean War, Britain celebrated her as a colonial war hero and a noteworthy personality. In the 1980s, Britain started exploring and re-defining its Black history in relation to rediscovered authors and texts. In the third and cotemporary phase the legacy of subjects such as Seacole becomes crucial for the politics of remembering the British slave trade sparked by the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007.<sup>49</sup> It is this tradition of qualifying the British as exceptional in their moral response to slavery while remaining strongly anchored in a capitalist logic that turns Seacole into the "perfect" Black Briton. For the politics of remembrance, the contemporary appropriation of early Black Britons also bolsters a retrospective construction of Britishness as "always already multicultural". By now, as Sara Salih (2004) points out, Mary Seacole herself has become a trademark for Jamaicans, nurses, and Black Britons. She was voted "greatest black Briton" in a 2004 poll that came in response to the BBC's Great Britons debate, which had been won by Winston Churchill but had *no* Black people in the top 100 (cf. Rupprecht 2006, 202–203).<sup>50</sup> The national politics of remembrance of Britain are remarkable here, aligning one hero of war with another.

Both Seacole and Dickens thus appear as ideal candidates to showcase a fatherly benevolence and motherly caring literary persona. Their tone of address can be characterised as consolidating Britishness. Dickens seems genuinely baffled that his candid remarks regarding American manners should stir controversy. His paternalistic admonishing tone of his travelogue appears more precarious in the growing transatlantic sphere and so it is the safety of the English home that his satirical depiction of telescopic philanthropy in *Bleak House* conjures up. There is also a safer distance between the fictional narrators and the historical persona in the novel. Seacole, in contrast, uses her *Adventures* to construe a heroic maternal Britishness that seems to work best when she advertises her British goods

abroad rather than when she actually is in Britain. Consequently, while Dickens consolidates a version of reform that is limited to the closeness of the home/nation, Seacole imagines Britishness as at once welcoming of Otherness and expansive in global reach. Her overt narration is strategically empowering and diminishes the effects of racism (often via humour). Both Dickens and Seacole therefore added to the Victorian family ideal which, in the course of the nineteenth century, became at once parochial and grandiose in its global imperial ambitions. As the disputed status of Seacole's legacy within British memorial culture demonstrates, the familiarity of belonging to Britain continues to be contested and reconstructed to this day.

## NOTES

1. An earlier shorter version of the reading of Seacole has been published previously and is reproduced with permission of WVT: Haschemi Yekani, Elahe. 2012. (M)Other Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures*: The Politics of Imagining the British Family. In *Anglistentag 2011: Freiburg. Proceedings*, ed. Monika Fludernik and Benjamin Kohlmann, 339–351. Trier: WVT. Earlier and much shorter versions of both readings of Seacole and Dickens have been published previously and are reproduced with permission of De Gruyter: Haschemi Yekani, Elahe. 2016. Feeling Modern: Narratives of Slavery as Entangled Literary History. In *The Humanities between Global Integration and Cultural Diversity*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Birgit Mersmann, 117–134. Berlin: De Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110452181-009.
2. Cvetkovich explores the rise of the so-called sensation novel as part of the larger nineteenth-century expansion of print culture that makes publications more accessible and wide-reaching: "Although circulating libraries and serial publication were already prevalent in the eighteenth century, between 1820 and 1860 there was a massive rise in the number of periodicals that published novels in serial form. The price of these publications, as well as the price of novels issued in book form, dropped considerably, making it possible for the reading material aimed at various different classes to sell in far greater numbers. The spectacular success of Dickens's novels, beginning with the serial publication of *The Pickwick Papers* in 1836, demonstrated that cultural production could be a profitable endeavor; however, the critics worried about the effects of mass publication on literary quality" (1992: 16).
3. In the following, quotes from the primary sources *American Notes for General Circulation* (Dickens 2000 [1842]), *Bleak House* (Dickens 2003



[1852–1853]), and *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* (Seacole 2005 [1857]) will be abbreviated as AN, BH, and WA respectively in all in-text citations.

4. Even though Seacole and Dickens were contemporaries and Dickens is extremely invested in the publications accompanying the Crimean War (cf. Moore 2004: 75–90), I could not find any explicit acknowledgement of their knowing of each other or each other's texts.
5. This transatlantic exchange produces literary bestsellers on both shores, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1981 [1852]), and leads to Frederick Douglass's travels to Britain in the 1840s (cf. Cooper 1996: 205).
6. Swaminathan sees this discourse indebted to the late eighteenth century, when, as a result of the American Revolution, "Writers in Great Britain pointed to the duplicity of the Americans who spoke of liberty and practiced slavery" (2009: 94).
7. Brantlinger influentially argued that predating the "New Imperialism" of the 1880s (culminating in the so-called Scramble for Africa), the myth of the "dark continent" was used to justify steady colonial expansion beginning already in the 1840s and 1850s. It is this context of the *rise* of the new imperial ideology that is still connected to abolitionist discourse in mid-nineteenth-century Victorian England that I discuss in this chapter. Brantlinger writes, "Paradoxically, abolitionism contained the seeds of empire. [...] [A]bolition was not purely altruistic but as economically conditioned as Britain's later empire building in Africa. [...] Britain could *afford* to legislate against the slave trade only after that trade had helped provide the surplus capital necessary for industrial takeoff. Britain had lost much of its slave-owning territory as a result of the American Revolution; as the leading industrial power in the world Britain found in abolition a way to work against the interests of rivals who were still heavily involved in colonial slavery and a plantation economy. [...] Applied to Africa, however, humanitarianism did point insistently toward imperialism. By the 1860s the success of the antislavery movement, the impact of the great Victorian explorers, and the merger in the social sciences of racist and evolutionary doctrines had combined, and the public widely shared a view of Africa which demanded imperialization on moral, religious, and scientific grounds. It is this view I call the myth of the Dark Continent [...]" (1988: 174).
8. Claybaugh who analyses the intertwined Anglo-American public sphere emphasises the Victorian appetite for travelogues: "more than two hundred British men and women published accounts of their travels in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century, and an equal



- number of men and women from the United States published accounts of their travels in Great Britain" (2007: 5).
9. Later in Canada, Dickens is also intrigued by a cross-dressing woman (AN 227). Greater mobility and changing gender conventions are thus inter-linked. Seacole too notes how more and more travelling women adopt male dress. However, from her, already precarious, position as a travelling woman of colour, she is always eager to reassure her English readers of her proper feminine attire.
  10. Dickens at one point also complains about how men and boys surround his carriage to stare at and even touch him (cf. AN 127–128). The famous visitor cannot simply observe anonymously, he is part of a new spectacular transnational celebrity culture.
  11. Christopher Mulvey emphasises the conventionality of the "genteel tone" of the travel literature of the time: "Literary decorum demanded that an author assumed a refined genteel voice in order to address society. The writer's written voice might be several tones more refined than the writer's spoken voice. The writer-travellers were therefore obliged to adopt a tone of voice which suggested very often that they were of a higher social standing than that to which their actual incomes or birth might otherwise entitle them" (1990: 8). This eagerness to appeal to a cultured gentlemanly English ideal shapes part of what I describe as Dickens's consolidating tonality.
  12. While Dickens, as mentioned, claims in the concluding remarks not to want to trouble his readers with his "own deductions and conclusions" (AN 266), statements like the following show an open disdain for lack of personal hygiene that many American readers must have found offensive: "In all modes of travelling, the American customs, with reference to the means of personal cleanliness and wholesome ablution, are extremely negligent and filthy; and I strongly incline to the belief that a considerable amount of illness is referable to this cause" (AN 175).
  13. In response to Dickens's damnation of slavery, many Americans in turn criticised Britain's own lack of reforming the conditions of the working class and Irish migrants as Moore explicates (cf. 2004: 49–50). Dickens, like other travellers, refutes these analogies although he himself will resort to similar strategies later in *Bleak House*.
  14. There was even an attempt to ban the book in South Carolina because of its disregard of a law that forbade white men to agitate against slavery in print (cf. Ingham's introduction in AN xxvii).
  15. Since the slave trade had been outlawed internationally, the system of chattel slavery was under pressure to "reproduce" slave labour on the plantations. Dickens condemns three types of slave owners: moderate ones that "inherited" their slaves and treat them well, those who buy and "breed"

slaves and deny any harm, and those who cannot endure the notion of equality and want to be served.

16. This testimonial approach to list the names of individuals who escaped enslavement could even be compared to the contemporary strategy of Black Lives Matter activists who demand that we “say their names” to recognise the humanity of those dehumanised by ongoing police brutality against African Americans which, many believe, has its root in America’s history of chattel slavery.
17. Valerie Purton discusses Dickens in the context of “the sentimental tradition” (2012). She argues that where Sterne fostered ambivalence, Dickens kept the sentimental and humorous apart. *American Notes* includes several “typical” sentimental scenes, for example, when Dickens describes a German prisoner in Philadelphia, again in terms of a heart-rending “picture of forlorn affliction”: “The taste and ingenuity he had displayed in everything were most extraordinary; and yet a more dejected, heart-broken, wretched creature, it would be difficult to imagine. I never saw such a picture of forlorn affliction and distress of mind. My heart bled for him; and when the tears ran down his cheeks, and he took one of the visitors aside, to ask, with his trembling hands nervously clutching at his coat to detain him, whether there was no hope of his dismal sentence being commuted, the spectacle was really too painful to witness. I never saw or heard of any kind of misery that impressed me more than the wretchedness of this man” (AN 114–115).
18. Dickens is annoyed when an American traveller identifies him as his literary alter ego Boz (AN 219). Thus, while bathing in fame as a celebrated author and public speaker, Dickens also reaps the more uncomfortable aspects of this new transatlantic celebrity culture.
19. There are the mentioned “Concluding Remarks” that follow the chapter on slavery, there is also an unpublished Introduction from 1842, Dickens’s 1850 Preface to the cheap edition as well as a Postscript to the 1868 Library edition.
20. In relation to the Native Americans Dickens encounters on his journey, he reproduces the idea of the “vanishing race” and is much less concerned with their genocide (that would implicate British settlers) than the institution of slavery that is now framed as an exclusively US-American aberration (cf. AN 184).
21. This fairly unoriginal ending however is succeeded by the mentioned chapter on slavery and the postscript which somewhat complicates its conciliatory impulse.
22. Daniel Hack argues that “*Bleak House* does not merely fail to imagine a community that includes Africans, African Americans, slaves, and people of color in general but rather consolidates the national community it does

- imagine by means of their exclusion" (2008: 731). Nevertheless, disregarding this parochial outlook, Hack also shows that African American print culture appropriated the novel for its own cause which he describes intriguingly as the "African Americanization" of *Bleak House*, most notably as a prominent intertext of Hannah Crafts's *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (2002 [1853]).
23. Carens argues that missionary zeal in the nineteenth century is tied to the earlier abolitionist campaign and the idea of brotherly connection. Both Evangelical missionaries and evolutionary theorists acknowledged kinship ties between humans "asserting the existence of a universal family" but also preserved "a sense of English superiority" (2005: 31). For Carens, this familiarity with the colonial Other gives rise to the Victorian "repressed fear that colonial 'otherness' dwells within the English state and culture" (2005: 47).
  24. This also demonstrates the ongoing precarious relationship between Blackness and femininity which are often construed as mutually exclusive. This can be seen in Seacole's strategic "over-performing" of femininity as well.
  25. The overall happy ending of the novel, too, rests to a large degree on Esther's successful domesticity that is firmly grounded in separate gendered spheres and promotes an uplifting service to those within her social circle, leaving the urban squalor behind her. Carens writes, "Esther and Woodcourt begin their married life in the strangely duplicated second Bleak House, an offshoot settlement of the home established by John Jarndyce. This 'colony,' unlike Borriboola-Gha, extends the circle of a middle-class, domestic civilization within the nation and reinforces rather than subverts traditionally gendered spheres of influence. [...] Esther extends the circle of civilization by ensuring that the young women who come under her benign supervision find a secure position within a domestic sphere of a suitable class" (2005: 115).
  26. For a Foucauldian study of the Victorian ideology of domesticity in Dickens's fiction, cf. Waters (1997). For a psychoanalytical perspective on family ties in his writing, cf. Lynn Cain who emphasises Dickens's reliance on domesticity: "Despite the panoramic scope of many of the later novels, Dickens is fundamentally a domestic novelist in that his narratives always centre on specific family relationships" (2008: 1).
  27. The right kind of familial philanthropy is also an answer to a potentially unruly working class that might take measures into their own hands (cf. Christianson 2007: 98). While Dickens wants a familiar version of reform, he is sceptical of regulation (and his autobiographical experience with debt prison is often cited as a case in point). Cf. Robbins (1990) for a Foucauldian reading of *Bleak House* that highlights this aspect.

28. Chennells (cf. 2000: 161–164) discusses Allan Woodcourt’s journey to China as an example of such a re-centring of London and masculinity. Woodcourt has to realise the “savageness” of the foreign objects of his philanthropic sympathy during his shipwreck only to heroically return to London and mourn the domestic neglect of Jo.
29. McLaughlin (cf. 1993: 877) discusses this theme of dangerous intimacy. So, while there should be sympathy, middle-class domesticity requires the clean safety of the home as opposed to the dirty streets of London.
30. Seacole seems to become more and more relevant as a fictional character rather than as an author in her own right. There is a reference to Seacole in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and she also appears as a fictional character in Bernardine Evaristo’s *Soul Tourists* (2005). Apparently, there is also a film based on her life in the making.
31. Rupprecht cautions that “the textual incursions made by the multiple authorising documents, references to an editor, and the necessity of a legitimising preface, all signal the dangers of conferring upon Seacole an entirely autonomous authorial voice” (2006: 199). I interpret this less as a weakening of her *authorial* position than as an expression of her *narrative* dialogical strategy.
32. In an instance when she thinks about the possibility of a many-legged pig, the comparison to the many-headed Hydra is marked as an addendum of her editor. Seacole writes, this was “as my editor tells me somebody called the Hydra (with whom my readers are perhaps more familiar than I am)” (WA 105).
33. Sandra Pouchet Paquet writes disapprovingly, “Seacole seeks English recognition and courts English approval” (1992: 652), others stress the “hybrid” or “liminal” process of identification (cf. Baggett 2000; Cooper 1996: 208; Silku 2008), a notion of “exile” (McKenna 1997), or “mobile subjectivity” (Fish 1997: 477).
34. Jessica Howell speaks of the book’s “straight-forward, sincere tone”. For her, Seacole’s “strategies of self-portrayal” are meant to ensure that “the white subjects in her books [sic] feel familiar and comfortable with her” (2010: 108–109).
35. Hawthorne (2000: 315) argues that the “I was born” beginning is a connection to the genre of the slave narrative rather than the war memoir (cf. also Birkle 2009: 107). However, one can also detect a link to the idealised *homo economicus* Robinson Crusoe whose fictional autobiography after all also begins with the words “I was born”. In this way, Seacole’s account is also embedded in the mercantilist tradition of the self-made man/woman (cf. Chap. 2).
36. Similar to Wedderburn, Seacole’s white Scottish father becomes instrumental in her notion of British familiarity. But while Wedderburn

includes his struggles with this familiarity in his narrative, explicitly trying to partake in the Wedderburn estate while simultaneously publicly calling out his family's involvement in enslavement, as discussed in the previous chapter, Seacole's father like her husband marks a conspicuous absence in the text. McMahon argues, "Neatly raising and then avoiding issues of racial ambiguity, intermarriage, and miscegenation, Seacole's self-description depends upon the presence and erasure of a white father who literally embodies her claim to Britishness, but whose influence is so absolutely undescribed that he seems more like a necessary precondition of her narrative legitimacy than an active component of it" (2008: 185). There is also speculation that Seacole might have had an illegitimate daughter, Sally, after her husband's death who, out of apparent motives, is not mentioned in her text at all (cf. Ramdin 2005; Rappaport 2005; also Gunning 2001: 956; Fluhr 2006: 96). In her biography, Jane Robinson surmises that Sally would have been a relative and not an actual daughter of Seacole (2005: 145).

37. Dallmann similarly argues, "By evoking an American Other, Seacole's narrative constructs a British 'us' which includes the colonial subject" (2012: 439).
38. Gunning elaborates that Seacole seems to disapprove of American chattel slavery but is critical of West Indian ex-slaves. She thereby acknowledges British abolitionist sentiment while catering to racist stereotypes about the "laziness" of the formerly enslaved who now threaten the dominance of the British West Indian planter class (cf. 2001: 966). At times, she derides the natives in Cruces and at other times she praises the freed slaves in New Granada (cf. Om 2014: 88).
39. This simultaneity of various states of freedom and unfreedom for racialised subjects in Central America at the time is apparent in another episode in Gorgona when Seacole recounts with great satisfaction how a young US American woman who chastised her female slave is ordered before the magistrate, "himself a man of colour", and sentenced to set the young woman free (cf. WA 52–53).
40. According to editor Salih, this possibly refers to George Sand (cf. WA 190).
41. Already in 1996 Simon Gikandi cautions no to conceptualise women as outsiders to colonial endeavours and speaks of "imperial femininity" (1996: 119–156).
42. Cf. Birkle (2009) and Fluhr (2006) for more elaborate discussions of the contrast between Nightingale and Seacole. While Seacole strategically does not discredit Nightingale, "that Englishwoman whose name shall never die" (WA 82), it is obvious that Nightingale did not accept Seacole as her equal. In a letter to her brother-in-law, she calls Seacole's British Hotel not "a bad house" but something not very unlike it" and complains that she "had the greatest difficulty in repelling Mrs Seacole's advances" (quoted in

Appendix in WA 180). “Bad house” alludes to probable sexual and other improprieties potentially exacerbated by Seacole’s racialisation. Seacole, in turn, goes to great lengths to emphasise that neither drunkenness nor dirt were ever tolerated in her hotel (cf. WA 126).

43. Seacole frequently cites letters from soldiers that open with “My Dear Mamma” (WA 112) and those who have been in the West Indies address her as “Mami” (WA 141).
44. In contrast to the emphasis on contagious diseases in *Bleak House* threatening middle-class femininity, Seacole praises her strong constitution that turns her into an ideal nurse. Howell (2010) reads this as Seacole’s valorisation of a specific mixed-race hybrid subjectivity.
45. Cf. Gautam Chakravarty’s (2005) study of so-called Mutiny novels for a detailed discussion of literary responses to the events of 1857.
46. Enticed by sensationalist writing about British women and children being killed in the massacre at Cawnpore, Dickens calls for what could be conceived of as “genocidal attitudes” (Brantlinger 1988: 126) in a letter to Angela Burdett-Coutts in 1857. Earlier Dickens had also infamously replicated racist ideas in his essay “The Noble Savage” in his journal *Household Words* (cf. Dickens 1853; Poon 2008: 105–109). While Moore states that she is not interested in probing Dickens’s political views, it is obvious that, for her, Dickens’s final publications stand in contrast to the more public racist outbursts in the 1850s which she considers “erratic” (2004: 131). This however appears strangely apologetic. Dickens later joins his mentor Thomas Carlyle to support Governor John Eyre, who had violently suppressed the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865, despite calls that he be held responsible for the killing of almost five hundred insurgents. Moore argues Dickens’s support for Eyre had “only [...] extended to a signature on a petition” (2004: 164). The infamous letter to W.W.F. de Cerjat, which she quotes in its entirety, does not amount to full-fledged racism because “compared to his previous calls for vengeance, one can see that it [his language] has become comparatively moderate” (2004: 165). The passage regarding Jamaica reads: “The Jamaican insurrection is another hopeful piece of business. That platform-sympathy with the black—or the native, or the devil—afar off, and that platform indifference to our own countrymen at enormous odds in the midst of bloodshed and savagery, makes me stark wild. Only the other day, here was a meeting of jawbones of asses at Manchester, to censure the Jamaica Governor for his manner of putting down the insurrection! So we are badgered about New Zealanders and Hottentots, as if they were identical with men in clean shirts at Camberwell and were bound by pen and ink accordingly” (Dickens 2011: 590–591). Moreover, visiting the United States for a second time in 1868 after the Civil War, Dickens continues to replicate Social Darwinist

ideas of white supremacy (cf. Taylor 2002: 97, 190). Moore herself concludes, “The racialized discourse that he adopted clearly displays a growing belief in the inferiority of non-white races that was never to leave him” but following this assessment immediately notes that Dickens “was far from being a systematic racist” (2004: 131) and continues to defend comments like those in the letter as “sporadic outbursts of prejudice against non-whites” and “knee-jerk reactions, grounded in the rhetoric of scientific racism, but lacking the force of a coherent argument” (2004: 166). This appears a more than puzzling conclusion to say the least. As becomes apparent time and again, supporting abolition and replicating racist modes of thinking was not a contradiction at all, especially with the rise of nineteenth-century scientific racism.

47. This nostalgia, Booker posits, is related to the theatricality of the Raj with its lavish visual displays of colonial might that gain relevance *after* the Mutiny (cf. Booker 1997: 171). I have discussed the role of photography for the colonial spectacle of white masculinity elsewhere at greater length, cf. Haschemi Yekani (2011: 78–105).
48. In another episode, Haitian royalty arrives in Jamaica and King Soulouque and his entourage wish to take up lodgings in Seacole’s sister’s hotel which she declines on account of what Trollope describes as the “contempt which the coloured people have for negroes”: “But the patriotic sister of Mrs. Seacole would listen to no such proposition. ‘I won’t keep a house for black men,’ she said to me. ‘As for kings, I would despise myself to have a black king. As for that black beast and his black women—Bah!’ Now this was certainly magnanimous, for Soulouque would have been prepared to pay well for his accommodation. But the ordinary contempt which the coloured people have for negroes was heightened in this case by the presumption of black royalty—perhaps also by loyalty. ‘Queen Victoria is my king,’ said Mrs. Seacole’s sister” (Trollope 1859: 117). Instead of an assumed loyalty based on race, Seacole’s sister emphasises her Royalist sentiment in an interesting gendering of the Queen. The Creole Seacole expresses her British patriotism by demeaning Black men and bestowing Queen Victoria honorary masculinity.
49. There now exists a statue of Mary Seacole, believed to be the first memorial statue of a Black woman by name in Britain, which was created by sculptor Martin Jennings. It is located opposite the Houses of Parliament in the grounds of St Thomas’ Hospital. Cf. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-36663206> (accessed 18 September 2019). This form of public commemoration has caused some controversy as the Nightingale Society strongly opposes the supposed “pioneer” status of Seacole and her contribution to the nursing profession which seems to be a contemporary symptom of their ongoing rivalry. Cf.

<http://nightingalesociety.com/category/misinformation/statue/> (accessed 18 September 2019). This again demonstrates the political tension around who can embody national “excellence”.

50. Cf. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/3475445.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/3475445.stm) (accessed 22 January 2012).

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## Conclusion: Queer Modes of Empathy as an Ethics of the Archive

At a time of Brexit and re-nationalisations in Europe and the United States, paying heed to historical global entanglements is more relevant than ever.<sup>1</sup> In Britain a toxic combination of Euro-scepticism paired with nostalgia for different British trade policies continues to impact public discourse, imaginations that, dare I say, supposedly would make Britain, too, “Great again” and echo the sentiment that Paul Gilroy has compellingly described as “postcolonial melancholia” (2005). This feeling, he argues, has limited a vision of British society as truly convivial.<sup>2</sup> Following increased postcolonial independence after World War II and the subsequent rise of neoliberalism and globalisation, Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century is struggling once more to define its national identity, let alone come to terms with the current challenges Brexit might pose to the status of Scotland and Ireland in the future. After a period of supposed “multicultural” flexibility, we witness the rise of assumptions of more rigid national belonging and contested affects around who can and who should not belong to the nation (“older” migrants from former colonies and commonwealth nations as opposed to newer East European migrants, Muslims versus Christians, etc.). As a way of closing, and more than ten years after the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade, I want to briefly shed light on how the transatlantic authors and their narratives that have been at the centre of this book have resurfaced and found their way into the contemporary museum landscape and larger memorial

culture. In doing so, I discuss in some more detail the debates on the ethics of the archive (of slavery) and contemporary affective responses to such materials that need to depart from uncritical conceptions of empathy.

Susan Buck-Morss for one criticises the lacking inclusivity of empathy. She writes,

Empathic imagination may well be our best hope for humanity. The problem is that we never seem to imagine this humanity inclusively enough, but only by excluding an antithetical other, a collective enemy beyond humanity's pale. (2009: 144)

But more than simply the failure to imagine a broad enough conception of empathy, empathy also often implicitly reproduces assumptions that go back to the mentioned eighteenth-century discourse on benevolent sympathy, as Saidiya Hartman emphasises:

We imaginatively witness the crimes of the past and cry for those victimized—the enslaved, the ravaged, and the slaughtered. And the obliterative assimilation of empathy enables us to cry for ourselves, too. (2002: 767)

We cannot continue simply to assume a humanistic paternalistic empathy with the suffering of “Others” that Hartman characterises as the “obliterative assimilation of empathy” which quickly becomes self-indulgent. Instead, with a turn to the writing on negative affects in queer theory and black radical thought, I want to propose a queering of empathy that should not rest on a celebratory approach to the past, as trauma overcome, but serve as a foundation of ongoing tension in contemporary narratives of familial feeling and national belonging. This includes ambivalence regarding the normative aspects of claiming familiarity. Finally, it is specifically the contemporary artistic response to the archive of enslavement and engagement with historical artefacts, as in the work of artist and curator Lubaina Himid, that I will discuss as a form of cross-temporal entanglement, which can function as an alternative to an all-too-congratulatory memorial culture that seeks British “Greatness” in the past.

## MEMORY AND AFFECT

By turning to memory and affect then, I conclude my interrogation of the historical rise of the British novel in showing how the construction of an exceptional British response to slavery continues to shape current politics

of remembrance, as does the concept of familial feeling. While the history of the United States and the impact of slavery on the genealogy of American families has been at the core of heated debates for a long time, it is only more recently in the wake of the bicentennial in 2007 that Britain has begun to address this past more seriously as part of a national (and shameful) heritage with the prominent opening of the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, as mentioned in the introduction. Much later than in the United States, British families now explore their often brushed-over “entangled family histories”.<sup>3</sup> While I cannot discuss at great length the role of the various museum exhibitions and memorials in relation to the bicentenary here, it seems noteworthy that abolition shows up as a familiar trope of reconciliatory Britishness.<sup>4</sup> Looking at these exhibitions and the feature film *Amazing Grace* (dir. Michael Apted), Waterton et al. criticise the homogenising narratives of the bicentenary that relied heavily on “generic templates of benevolence, heroism, justice and shared values” (2010: 26) and thus promoted “a celebratory narrative of the munificence of abolition as opposed to the complicity, guilt and shame of enslavement” (2010: 29). Wood, too, calls 2007 a shibboleth and criticises “an undue emphasis upon a celebratory approach to a supposed magical and chimerical moment of transformation” (2010: 164). Britain’s role as pioneering the earliest form of what can be labelled a “human rights campaign” *avant la lettre* thus informs the country’s contemporary attempts in reconstructing its past. The fight against slavery is commemorated by honouring the legacy of white and Black abolitionists like William Wilberforce and Olaudah Equiano. However, while it is commendable to acknowledge Black agency in the past finally more fully, exhibits like the mentioned “Black Achievers Wall” in Liverpool run the risk of levelling the archive of the early Black Atlantic. This caters to a politics of feelings built on a “happy”<sup>5</sup> inclusive history which threatens to unremember or overwrite the (many) lives lost precisely by accentuating the achievements of those (few) modern Black subjects whose testimonies have survived to this day. In other words, this contemporary appropriation of early Black Britons functions, as mentioned in relation to Seacole in the previous chapter, as a retrospective idealisation of Britishness as “always already multicultural” thereby resorting to an all-too-contented archive of Britishness.<sup>6</sup> Equiano, Sancho, and Seacole, who are honoured on the wall in Liverpool, are reduced to poster children of a celebratory memorial culture that engages too little with the actual—as I have argued throughout this book, often contradictory—texts of the authors (and I believe it is

no coincidence that the least canonical of the writers discussed here, the more quarrelsome Wedderburn, did not make the list so far).<sup>7</sup>

Nations and national memorial cultures feed the self-understanding of communities (cf. Bhabha 1990; Anderson 1991). In this context, we need to proliferate an understanding of national histories not as sacrosanct enclosed entities but as always contested and entangled with various Others. The mission of this book then in relation to British literary history was not simply to “add” Black voices to the canon, to the realm of respectable Britishness, but to enquire about a shared “tone” or “tonality” of Britishness, about the entangled aesthetic projects of creating familial feeling. In order to interrogate when something or someone feels familiar it focused on four different tonalities of Britishness that are emphatically not understood as a teleological account of the rise of affective realism in prose writing which simply caters to ever more inclusivity. Instead I highlighted four different entangled tonalities in the shifting imaginary of what constitutes Britishness, influenced by the debate on the abolition of the slave trade and moral sentiment in the eighteenth century to the rise of imperial ambitions and social reform in the nineteenth. While Defoe and Equiano laid *foundations* for an insular versus a more dialogical concept of modern subjectivity, respectively, Sancho and Sterne conversed as men of letters whose *digressions* challenged aesthetic conventions of how to narrate both Black and white subjectivity. Employing different narratological means, the early nineteenth-century writing of Austen and Wedderburn imagined *resistances* to a domestic ideal that controls women and violently ignores the British progeny in the colonies. Dickens and Seacole, on the brink of greater imperial expansion in the mid-nineteenth century, could neatly dismiss slavery as an American abnormality and *consolidated* a more “homely” version of Britishness, which in Seacole’s text embraced people of colour, whereas Dickens envisioned the nation only ever as white exclusively.

These often-contested attempts of rendering Blackness “familiar” have ongoing effects. Christina Sharpe, for instance, describes the affective and embodied afterlife of slavery as all-encompassing, like the “weather”, a mundane deadly climate of anti-Blackness. Sharpe challenges language and draws connections across time that are distinctly not sentimental, to “depict aesthetically the impossibility of [...] resolutions by representing the paradoxes of blackness within and after the legacies of slavery’s denial of Black humanity” (2016: 14), as she describes the project of her book *In the Wake*. It is with this contemporary affective dimension in mind that I



want to once more address the ethics of the archive that I had to navigate in the literary readings in the preceding chapters.

### ETHICS OF THE ARCHIVE

How can (postcolonial) literary and cultural scholars intervene into homogenising and progressivist accounts of family and the trauma of slavery while paying close attention to the affective imprint these often-sentimentalised accounts might leave on readers today? In contrast to highlighting creative counter archives and writing back as many artists and scholars do, I have (re)turned to the official archive of English literature in this book, an archive that is readily accessible to readers.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, by reflecting on the ethics of reading that has informed my research, I want to argue in this coda that a non-celebratory approach to the (entangled) official archive can be both queer and reparative. Rather than turning our backs to canonical literature, I see potential in reframing, analysing the past without over-emphasising “achievement” as has been the case in some of the mentioned bicentennial commemorations.

Methodologically there are currently two competing strands in how to deal with the textual documents of enslavement. One can contrast the more overtly politicised queer impulse of embracing negative feelings and affects, which critics such as Ann Cvetkovich endorse, with what Stephen Best and others call a depsychologising form of “surface reading” (cf. Best 2012; Best and Marcus 2009). In a paradoxical move, my own readings would fall somewhere in the middle between these seemingly contradictory approaches via a recourse to a Sedgwickian reparative ethics of the text. Before explaining this proposal in greater detail, I will juxtapose the two competing methods of reading.

Cvetkovich traces what she calls America’s “political depression” back to the “absent archive of slavery”. She analyses Hartman’s personal account of the history of the transatlantic slave trade, *Lose Your Mother* (2008a), as an attempt “to bring slavery (and its ghosts) to life again, especially affectively, in order to demonstrate its persistent effect on the present” (2012: 136). Cvetkovich compliments Hartman’s honesty in including the disappointed affective connections to Africa she seeks and often does not find in her account of her travels as an African American scholar to Ghana to research the history of enslavement. Cvetkovich sees this embrace of feelings of failure and despair in relation to the afterlife of slavery as harbouring the potential for Sedgwickian “reparative feelings”

(2012: 141). Closely linked to the idea of the reparative is the understanding of the temporality of the archive: Is it a signifier of remote violence of the past, or, is there a more immediate connection to how bodies are politicised and policed today?<sup>9</sup> Hartman explores what she calls the “time of slavery” to describe a notion of contemporaneity of past and present, not a progression or the overcoming of trauma, but coequality.<sup>10</sup> She frames this as

the relation between the past and the present, the horizon of loss, the extant legacy of slavery, the antinomies of redemption [...] and irreparability. In considering the time of slavery, I intend to trouble the redemptive narratives crafted by the state in its orchestration of mourning, the promises of filiation proffered by petty traders, and the fantasies of origin enacted at these slave sites. As well, the “time of slavery” negates the common-sense intuition of time as continuity or progression, then and now coexist; we are coeval with the dead. (Hartman 2002: 759)

But how does such an insight translate into methods of reading archival material, to avoid “redemptive narratives”? Should readings be guided by emotional reactions, inflected by our different contemporary positionalities in relation to the rampant daily forms of racism(s)? And how is such an emotional attachment translated formally into modes of representation so that they do not simply reproduce the violence they hope to abate. As I pointed out earlier, historically progressive abolitionist accounts very often promoted sentimentalising spectacles of Black suffering. Accordingly, Hartman frames the dilemma of the contemporary engagement with the archive of slavery: How can we “tell a story about *degraded matter* and dishonored life that doesn’t delight and titillate” (2008b: 7)?

In her essay, “Venus in Two Acts” reflecting on the writing of *Lose Your Mother* Hartman herself is explicit in her reparative understanding of narrative, especially what she calls counter-histories of slavery, which I will try to reconstruct in some detail. Hartman argues:

Loss gives rise to longing, and in these circumstances, it would not be far-fetched to consider stories as a form of compensation or even as reparations, perhaps the only kind we will ever receive. [...] For me, narrating counter-histories of slavery has always been inseparable from writing a history of present, by which I mean the incomplete project of freedom, and the precarious life of the ex-slave, a condition defined by the vulnerability to premature death and to gratuitous acts of violence. (2008b: 4)

In her understanding, storytelling is a form of reparation that is needed to counter historical injustice (cf. also Lowe 2015). Hartman calls this a method of “critical fabulation”:

“Fabula” denotes the basic elements of story, the building blocks of the narrative. [...] By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done. [...] I have emphasized the incommensurability between the prevailing discourses and the event, amplified the instability and discrepancy of the archive, flouted the realist illusion customary in the writing of history, and produced a counter-history at the intersection of the fictive and the historical. (Hartman 2008b: 11–12)

For her, the scholar’s task is to come up with counter-histories. While I find this creative impulse highly instructive, I did not turn to contemporary reimaginings of the archive<sup>11</sup> but rather to the historical contemporaneous entanglements of early Black Atlantic and canonical authors and, as I have emphasised, this entanglement is of course an encounter shaped by cultural hegemonies that do not simply give rise to oppositional writing. On the contrary, within the framework of being dependant on creating familiarity there is a complex interplay between embracing British colonialism and demanding to be heard as Black subjects with agency. In this context, it seems to me to be exactly the task of the critic to deal with the ambivalent feelings that the historical sources give rise to, which is, of course, what Hartman’s account self-reflexively accomplishes as well. However, in a too strong focus on writing back to the archive, be it in fictional re-writings or in academic self-reflexiveness regarding the “emptiness” of the archive, we might forego the chance to read the fissures of the historical sources that we do have access to. And in many ways, in “Venus in Two Acts” Hartman herself urges scholars to tell the story of slavery in multiple ways that do justice both to the textual corpus available to us *and* acknowledge that the loss of other voices is a symptom of systematic violence that we cannot ignore. Hartman thus engages with the absences and presences in the archive of slavery. The editors of the *Social Text* issue on “The Question of Recovery” from 2015, too, argue that “we must develop new approaches to archival recuperation that could illuminate forms of

black politics beyond narratives of radical redemption or liberal inclusion” (Helton et al. 2015: 8). Thus, while I did not follow “critical fabulation” as a method, my reference to four different tonalities of entangled literary voices aims to diversify an understanding of a distinctly British narrative of familial feeling in relation to the abolition of slavery and its aftermath in a colonialist society.

In contrast to Hartman (and Cvetkovich), Best suggests an entirely different way of interpreting the archive of slavery. Best calls for a radical turn away from what he terms “melancholic historicism” (2012: 472) and a disregard of feeling when dealing with slavery. The pivotal point here again seems to concern the assumed affective connection between representations of the past and the present: If one believes that “slavery” is a cause of contemporary political depression, what reparative work is one asking the text/imagery to perform? Any affect one can have in relation to slavery is “after the fact”, after all. Best suggests that scholars of the history of slavery should attempt to “flatten” the archive and limit the affective investment in literary texts. Pointedly, he asks, “Why must we predicate having an ethical relation to the past on an assumed continuity between that past and our present and on the implicit consequence that to study that past is somehow to intervene in it?” (Best 2012: 454) and he continues, “we might thus have to resist the impulse to redeem the past and instead rest content with the fact that our orientation toward it remains forever perverse, queer, askew” (Best 2012: 456). I agree with Best here that resisting the emotionalising discourse of an ongoing trauma of slavery, often tied to reproductive/heteronormative family conceptions after all, might offer ways of rejecting unifying the narratives of Black belonging in favour of more ambivalence, for example regarding what it meant to be Black and British in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in relation to the sources at hand. According to Best, the past is a queer object of our current emotional desires for redemption that we should resist.

Nevertheless, the archive of slavery, the result of historical exclusion, wavers between loss and recovery: it is characterised by the problematic absence of subjugated voices, the violence of the sources that did make it into official archives, and the graphic depictions of harm that we have access to today. Both the canon of slave narratives and abolitionist writing as well as the visual depiction of injured Black bodies affect contemporary readers of these materials in visceral ways. Consequently, what media-specific reflections do we have to bring to our methodologies? Is there a fundamental difference between the “identity forming” act of writing in

first-person literary accounts and the objectifying process of becoming an image, which Best diagnoses for the visual archive of slavery? Especially for the realm of the visual Best bemoans the striking emptiness of the archive:

These questions have everything to do with an emptiness at the heart of the archive: however exhaustive one's catalog of the visual archive of slavery, it will always be lacking in works by slaves themselves. There are no visual equivalents of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. We have yet to discover a Frederick Douglass or Olaudah Equiano of the canvas. When it comes to the representation of the inner life of the enslaved, few of our sources are visual in nature. For slaves are not the subject of the visual imagination, they are its object. (Best 2011: 151)

While I find Best's caution about the unchallenged linearity between violence of the past and romanticised notions of contemporary intervention absolutely conclusive, the attempt to establish a less ideological form of engagement with cultural objects as a form of "surface reading" can also appear caught up in a hope for a "cleansing" of the archive from messy emotionality. His argument regarding "the representation of the inner life of the enslaved" that the self-penned narrative provides in contrast to the objectifying visual media must be met with some caution. The accounts that he cites were often heavily edited, sometimes penned by white amanuenses, and embedded in the discussed generic framework of sentimentalism.

David Kazanjian hence also formulates hesitation towards forms of surface reading that supposedly produce knowledge closer to the historical truth of the text, rather than the "melancholic historicism" of the reader's present. He defends what is disparagingly called (poststructuralist) "overreading":

On its face, the charge typically means that the overreader has attributed a meaning to a text that would have been impossible for the context in which the text was written or for the people who wrote the text. The charge also suggests that overreaders have an inadequate knowledge of history, that they have improperly assigned contemporary meanings to a noncontemporary text, that their perspective is unduly clouded by contemporary presuppositions. [...] The charge of overreading presumes a strict separation between historically contextualized reading and ahistorical reading, which in turn presumes that one can adequately determine the context in which a text was written and linger in that context with the text in a kind of epistemic

intimacy. That is, the charge presumes that one can read *as if* one inhabited the same historical scene as the text one is reading; in this sense, as a kind of time travel, the charge of overreading belongs in the genre of science fiction or speculative fiction. (Kazanjian 2015: 80)

Once more the relationship between the temporality of the text's present and its current interpretation is crucial. It seems to me that two legitimate concerns in Kazanjian's defence of overreading are conflated. The first pertains to the mentioned historical contextualisations of texts: how much are readings informed by our limited ability to grasp the historical context of a text and presentist investments in it? In this regard, he is surely right that the underlying assumption of a "correct" interpretation based on "epistemic intimacy" seems suspect. On the other hand, there is concern that the very content of a text might get distorted to the point where a reading is so overdetermined by contemporary meaning that it bears no relation to the source itself, and I do believe that a self-critical interrogation into methodologies of reading needs to account for the text in the form of the events and characters that are represented verbally. So, what if, for a moment and only as a first step, we focused less on the historically accurate or less accurate interpretation of the text and more on the level of narration in a purely structuralist understanding of what is said how (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 2009: 3), as an ethics of the text.

Heather Love, too, calls for an "alternative ethics, one grounded in documentation and description rather than empathy and witness" (2010: 80). Love understands this as part of a greater "descriptive turn" in literary studies which favours a method of reading that is "literal rather than symptomatic" (2010: 383), "close but not deep" (2010: 375), "that departs from a depth hermeneutics and is primarily descriptive in its orientation" (2010: 382). Rather than position transatlantic and canonical British writers as politically opposing projects of literary identity formation, I was more intrigued by their entangled tonalities. This focus on aesthetics, via Ngai's (2007) conceptualisation of tone, is certainly indebted to an interest in surface and precise description. However, like Ngai, I would caution that the descriptive and the affective seem less easily resolvable than such a methodology, or trust in the scholar's ability to provide surface readings, might suggest and this finally brings me to the concept of reparative reading, which literary and queer critic Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick coined. As is well-known, Sedgwick proposed reparative versus paranoid modes of reading in her influential 1997 essay "Paranoid Reading

and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is About You". Looking at the described methods of affective versus descriptive reading, it is interesting to note that Cvetkovich's reading of Hartman as well as Best and Love refer to the reparative mode that Sedgwick favours, but it seems to me from two rather contradictory points of view: Best positions the reparative on the level of the text, trying to account for what is actually stated in the source as an ethics of the textual that should not be overdetermined by contemporary affective responses. Sedgwick calls this an "accountability to the real" (1997: 2). And in this regard Kazanjian's defence of "overreading" comes too easy because it only focuses on the charge against correct historical contextualisation. If we understand interpretation also as a dissecting of the actual words on the page, then there can be an interpretation that is indeed closer to the text than others that might appear more far-fetched.

In the late 1990s, Sedgwick criticises New Historicists and critics of the left for paranoidly trying to uncover, to expose a hidden political agenda of the sources they analysed. Instead, Sedgwick chooses a close reading of the text that is open to surprise. To her, rather than linger on the inevitable, queer readings should embrace contingency. Nevertheless, Sedgwick is not merely descriptive, and this is where the affective dimension re-enters that is central to Cvetkovich. Cvetkovich, in some ways, at first sight, appears more indebted to a paranoid political position in her turn to negative affects. But rather than position a form of positive identity politics as the only alternative, which a simplistic understanding of counter-history would promote, Cvetkovich via Hartman normalises failure; her essay is called "depression is ordinary" after all. She frames the engagement with negative affects as psychologically reparative and, paradoxically, potentially politically mobilising. The fact that we might not be able to reconstruct a coherent archive of slavery or the historical truth, also means that other pasts and other futures become imaginable. So, whether we follow a turn to surface, or to affect, the impulse that unites these approaches is their Sedgwickian interest in an ethics of engagement with texts and with politics that is not immediately self-evident in an ideological framing of positive representation. For her this is what characterises the reparative mode. As Sedgwick concludes,

No less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic, the reparative reading position undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions,

and risks. What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways in which selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them. (Sedgwick 1997: 35)

Clearly then we can see how the novel as a central literary cultural form has also offered different ways to find sustenance, to create community across difference but also express dissent in relation to hegemonic norms.

Following such an understanding of reparative reading, it is important to engage directly with the violence of the past taking seriously the textuality of the sources. By returning to the rise of the British novel from a transatlantic perspective, I did not intend to offer a “redemptive” understanding of British multiculturalism that we can project to the past to make us feel better about today. With the close readings in the preceding chapters I hope to have demonstrated that prose writing offered aesthetically diverse and politically ambivalent imaginations of British modernity that were both violently exclusionary and at the same time also a creative resource for claiming familiarity. This ambivalence and yet attention to the text is what I glean from the debates on the ethics of reading. Our reading practices can be “reparative” only in the queer/postcolonial understanding of resisting a linear narrative of liberal emancipation. Or, in the words of José Muñoz, to imagine a mode of the reparative that acknowledges the violence of the past does not require a mythical idea of “wholeness”:

Indeed I do find the reparative to be a productive theoretical stance. For me it is a resource to imagine something else that might follow social stigma or even ruination. While I am interested in the work that the reparative might offer groups who have experienced some version of social violence or death, I would certainly agree that the reparative is not automatically about the integrity or sense of wholeness a collective or group may long for. (Muñoz 2013: 110–111)

To close, I want to suggest that the work of artist Himid departs from a simplistic celebratory approach to the history of enslavement/abolition in Britain. Her work in many ways functions as such a queer reparative lens on the artefacts that were displayed in the context of the bicentennial.



## QUEERING MODES OF EMPATHY

As literary scholars we tend to overemphasise the function of literature as making us see the world through the eyes of another and to immediately equate this with a progressive form of empathy as I have argued throughout. Against such binarism of self and Other, *Familial Feeling* tried to demonstrate that the literary rise of depicting authentic emotionality and aesthetic tonalities of prose writing were in fact entangled in transatlantic exchanges from their inception. In the context of the museum (catering to different age groups) there is often not enough room for lengthy (textual) explanation of the ambivalent aspects of this exchange and the early Black Atlantic authors unfortunately at times are reduced to placeholders for a one-dimensional progressivist version of agency. However, despite this criticism what is remarkable is that more and more curators, especially in attempts to attract more “diverse” audiences into museum spaces, are aware that there are challenges in exhibiting the same objects and images of Black degradation like the reproductions of the slave ship *Brookes*, chains, or the Wedgwood medallion over and over. In my experience with the bicentennial exhibitions, one of the best ways to contextualise paternalistic images of white benevolence and Black victimhood was to put the historical artefacts in conversation with the negative contemporary affects that they might provoke. In this way, the museum acknowledges the object in the archive and at the same time provides a material expression of the coeval affective responses to the violence of the past.<sup>12</sup> This form of juxtaposition can open routes into an alternative and not a paternalistic mode of empathy, not a celebration of abolition but a commemoration of enslavement and its afterlife.

Obviously, such a queering of memory is not an easily digestible or marketable aspect of British heritage. As part of their 2007 activities, the Lancashire Museums commissioned contemporary artist (and 2017 Turner Prize winner) Lubaina Himid to produce an installation at the Judges’ Lodgings (Fig. 6.1).

With “Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service” Himid presents a disarrayed memorial site. According to the descriptions on the artist’s webpage, she collected hundred used ceramic pieces from the local shops in Lancaster and surroundings (plates, jugs, and tureens, some of them cracked) and overpainted them with acrylic paint. The title, “swallow hard”, and the crammed table divert any sentimental impulse of benevolent abolitionism and a celebratory resistance. Using the polished surface



**Fig. 6.1** Lubaina Himid, *Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service*, 2007 (installation photograph). (Courtesy Judges' Lodgings Museum, Lancashire County Council)

of the china, Himid does not deliver cleansing affects or gratifying, “deep” images of emotional suffering, she adds layers to the surface. Both the depicted scenes and the form of overpainting and interweaving of traditional West African patterns (from Mali, Nigeria, and Ghana) with the original design on the ceramics, bear witness to the entangled history that shapes the city of Lancaster to this day. Himid is not offering empathy as a one-way entry into “identifying” with Black suffering, she confronts the viewers with a messier account of enslavement and its abolition. Queering empathy, in this context, means to leave the more uncomfortable aspects of this (family) history on the table rather than sweeping them under the carpet. The dinner service, a signifier of bourgeois decorum and civilisation, clearly shows the British involvement in the slave trade that is often imagined as somehow more polite. On the crowded mahogany table, she assembles images of the merchant class that grew rich next to nameless Black servants whose fictional names she writes within the objects (Fig. 6.2a). Instead of the begging slave on the Wedgwood medallion, she



**Fig. 6.2** (a and b) Lubaina Himid, *Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service*, 2007 (detail). Acrylic on found porcelain, variable dimensions. (Courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London. Photo: Andy Keate)

shows the hypocrisy of raging white men and women who are now confronted with the “rapid effects of abolition” (Fig. 6.2b).

Global entanglements, including the history of enslavement, its abolition, and imperial expansion, as well as contemporary globalised structures of inequality shape any understanding of the British nation state. This continues to impact mundane affects of belonging, a feeling of familiarity that objects such as ceramics, often passed down for generations in families, help transmit. With her installation Himid literally puts a smudged version of this family history on display. Enslavement, as authors like Hartman and Sharpe have argued compellingly for the United States, is not simply a thing of the past. We need to confront the ambivalent feelings that this history still instils today, and this cannot be achieved by remembering abolition solely as a success story of enlightened modernity that forgets the ambivalences of the historical documents and neglects the ongoing effects of racism that continue to limit who is seen—those historically excluded Black bodies that Himid paints onto the artefacts as well as the artistic practice by people of colour then and now—and, by extension, who is familiar enough to be considered part of the nation.

## NOTES

1. Some of the thoughts raised here and in earlier chapters appear in a differently framed co-written paper that discusses the current politics of remembering Black Britons like Equiano, Sancho, and Seacole as well as the

- reluctance to employ the category “race” in analyses of German medieval texts and is reproduced with permission of Campus: Michaelis, Beatrice, and Elahe Haschemi Yekani. 2014. Queering Archives of Race and Slavery—Or, on Being Wilfully Untimely and Unhappy. In *Postcoloniality—Decoloniality—Black Critique: Joints and Fissures*, ed. Sabine Broeck and Carsten Junker, 269–283. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
2. According to Gilroy, “postcolonial melancholia” describes those “powerful feelings of comfort and compensation [that] are produced by the prospect of even a partial restoration of the country’s long-vanished homogeneity. Repairing that aching loss is usually signified by the recovery or preservation of endangered whiteness” (2005: 88).
  3. The M Shed Museum in Bristol opened in 2011 and displays family trees of families who only recently learned that they had Afro-Caribbean ancestors. The contemporary positive “multicultural” image of Britain is bolstered through the emotionalised reference to the mix-raced family of the past here. In the United States, projects such as “Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery” (<http://informationwanted.org/>) make available digitalised ads of fugitive slaves for families to explore their ancestors’ fates. The 2016 opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington D.C. obviously addresses the history of slavery in the United States but also exhibits an image of African American culture that surpasses enslavement with a focus on “values like resiliency, optimism, and spirituality” (<https://nmaahc.si.edu/about/museum>).
  4. In addition to the mentioned Bristol and Liverpool exhibitions, the most relevant in this context are the Gallery “London, Sugar and Slavery” in the Museum of London Docklands, “The Atlantic Gallery: Slavery, Trade, Empire” in the National Maritime Museum and Wilberforce House in Hull. Cf. Hamilton (2010); Korte and Pirker (2011); Kowaleski-Wallace (2006); Tibbles (2008); Waterton et al. (2010). In addition to exhibitions and museums the question of memorials is even more complicated with no single national memorial site that would commemorate the victims of the slave trade in the United States to this day. Rice (2010) discusses several memorial sites in Ghana, France, the Netherlands, and the “Gilt of Cain” monument in London.
  5. In her work on feminist killjoys, Ahmed (2010) highlights the limiting aspects of “happiness” which is often evoked in order to foreclose more radical challenges to social norms.
  6. The Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, the “race riots” in the twentieth century, and the rise in Islamophobia after 9/11 are not part of this “happy” archive of what constitutes “multicultural” Britishness today. Accordingly, Catherine Hall (2010: 196) cautions that (Christian) Black Britons are often imagined as more compatible with the idea of “multiculturalism” in

contrast to Muslim migrants who are perceived as the “threat from within”, especially after 9/11 and 7/7. Such a limited notion of multiculturalism overlooks the effects of structural racism which still impact the daily lives of many Britons regarding anything from school performance to mental health.

7. Again, while I entirely welcome the commemoration of early Black Britons in museum exhibits or even statues, many forms of memorial culture problematically stylise these subjects as overly heroic in relation to their national affiliation with Britain (and do not consider more ambivalent aspects of their biographies or writing).
8. All texts discussed are available in scholarly editions and, with the exception maybe of Wedderburn, are widely taught at universities.
9. Avery Gordon introduced the concept of “haunting” (2008) to describe the ongoing influence of disavowed violent pasts such as slavery on the contemporary sociological imagination.
10. In a co-authored paper, Best and Hartman (2005) extend this temporal argument to the impossibility of legal compensation for slavery.
11. Many contemporary neo-slave narratives, like Caryl Phillips’s *Cambridge* (1991), Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song* (2010), and Colson Whitehead’s *Underground Railroad* (2016), aim to fill the gaps imaginatively and provide accounts of Black agency retrospectively.
12. The gallery “London, Sugar and Slavery” in the Museum of London Docklands, for instance, places a showcase called “The Price of Sweetness” next to the bowls and plates with the Wedgwood imagery of kneeling enslaved people. Here visitors can see “Pottery made by members of the elder women’s group from the ACVA (African and Caribbean Voices Association) based in Stratford, East London” (description of the display cabinet, transcribed during personal visit). The objects of the female community members thus form an important counterweight and display of agency in response to the paternalism of the historical object.

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# INDEX<sup>1</sup>

## A

- Abolition, 1, 3, 4, 9–11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 33, 36, 38, 41n2, 46n28, 47n34, 47n35, 47n36, 47n37, 50n48, 52n57, 89, 97, 107, 110n6, 113n28, 128, 133, 142, 145, 147, 150, 160n10, 163n29, 174, 175, 177, 178, 180, 187, 205, 209n12, 224, 236, 240, 244, 257, 259n7, 266n46, 273, 275, 276, 280, 284–287
- Adventure, 24, 69, 70, 72, 75, 85–89, 93, 95, 100, 104, 105, 109n6, 225, 241–243, 257
- Affect, 6, 7, 19, 24, 36, 38, 49n41, 50–51n49, 55n71, 81, 106, 114n37, 136, 152, 241, 246, 247, 255, 273–277, 280, 283, 285–287
- Ahmed, Sara, 50n49, 246, 288n5
- Amelioration, 18, 47n35, 54n67, 123, 147, 148, 214n46
- American War of Independence, 46n29
- Anderson, Benedict, 8, 43n13, 276
- Aravamudan, Srinivas, 10, 11, 32, 54n67, 88, 89, 100, 108, 113n29, 114n43, 115n49, 115n50, 214n43
- Archive, 3, 6, 32, 37, 38, 53n62, 160n7, 187, 273–287, 288n6
- Asante, Amma, 46n30
- Autobiography, 28, 29, 52n58, 70, 85, 88, 90, 94, 101, 110n8, 114n36, 126, 153, 162n21, 194, 204, 240–242, 248, 263n35

## B

- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich, 26, 71, 81, 82, 91, 93, 241
- Behn, Aphra, 26, 29, 42n8, 52n59, 80, 106, 137, 215n51, 231
- Belle, Dido Elizabeth, 46n30

<sup>1</sup> Note: Page numbers followed by ‘n’ refer to notes.



Benezet, Anthony, 92  
 Bhabha, Homi K., 8, 55n69, 90, 126, 151, 198, 243, 276  
 Bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade (2007), 1, 257  
 Bicknell, John, 94  
 Bildungsroman, 99  
 Black Atlantic, 3, 5, 6, 21, 23, 29, 32, 35, 38, 45n24, 49n42, 53n61, 88, 93, 103, 126–128, 194, 195, 211n22, 215n53, 243, 275, 279, 285  
 Black Lives Matter, 1, 261n16  
 Blair, Tony, 1, 2, 41n2  
 Brontë, Charlotte, 31, 33, 42n8, 49n44, 49n46  
 Butler, Judith, 39, 40, 56n77

**C**  
 Cannibalism, 81–83, 97, 112n18, 114n39  
 Carlyle, Thomas, 49n47, 265n46  
 Carretta, Vincent, 28, 92, 98, 104, 114n41, 127, 129, 134, 160n9  
 Catholic Relief Act, 128  
 Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de, 26, 127  
 Chakrabarty, Dipesh, 28  
 Charity, 9, 22, 135  
 Chartism, 50n48  
 Civilising mission, 44n18, 187, 212n34  
 Civil War, 20, 226, 265n46  
 Clarkson, Thomas, 178, 210n17  
 Coetzee, J. M., 112n23  
 Colonialism, 6, 11, 30, 32, 33, 44n18, 70, 174, 187, 209n13, 279  
 Colston, Edward, 1  
 Conrad, Joseph, 209n12  
 Copyright, 226, 230, 233

Counterpoint, 33, 36, 175, 178, 179, 205  
 counterpuntal, 33, 34, 46–47n33  
 Country-house novel, 173, 192  
 Crafts, Hannah, 262n22  
 Crimean War, 240–242, 249, 253, 257, 259n4  
 Cugoano, Quobna Ottobah, 46n33, 94, 205

**D**

D’Aguiar, Fred, 45n23  
 Day, Thomas, 94  
 Declaration of Independence, 232  
 Defoe, Daniel, 4, 6, 10, 25, 26, 28, 29, 34, 35, 39, 41, 42n6, 42n8, 49n44, 51n52, 52n58, 52n59, 69–108, 124, 128, 154, 157, 164n40, 173, 174, 205, 276  
 Dialogicity, 26, 71, 72, 76, 81, 83, 106, 244  
 Dickens, Charles, 4, 6, 10, 14, 23, 33, 40, 41, 86, 102, 161n16, 165n42, 205, 211n24, 223–258, 276  
 Double-consciousness, 51n51, 94  
 Douglass, Frederick, 20, 259n5, 281  
 Du Bois, W. E. B., 25, 51n51, 94

**E**

Eliot, George, 50n48, 208n6  
 Emotion, 21, 22, 24, 49n41, 50n49, 51n50, 124, 134–136, 158, 161n19, 182, 190, 192, 193, 246  
 Empathy, 5, 25, 51n50, 52n57, 132, 135, 149, 198, 273–287  
 Engels, Friedrich, 8  
 Enlightenment, 3, 10–15, 19, 21, 27, 35, 38, 42n6, 45n25, 54n67, 90, 96, 97, 131, 213n35

Enslavement, 5, 12, 88, 92, 93, 102,  
123, 124, 127, 134, 135, 138,  
144, 147, 148, 158, 165n43,  
199, 211n24, 215n52, 224, 228,  
235, 247, 261n16, 264n36, 274,  
275, 277, 284–287, 288n3

*See also* Slavery

Entangled modernities, 4

Entanglement, 3, 9, 11, 12, 28, 30,  
32–35, 37, 38, 42n9, 53n63,  
55n69, 71, 127, 138, 151, 157,  
159n4, 174, 188, 195, 196, 201,  
205, 213n34, 215n50, 224, 227,  
243, 244, 273, 274, 279, 287

Epic, 26, 81

Epistolary novel, 40, 123, 124, 141

Equiano, Olaudah (aka Gustavus  
Vassa), 4, 6, 10, 12, 19, 27–29,  
34, 35, 38–41, 45n22, 47n33,  
69–108, 124, 126–128, 132,  
139, 160n11, 162n21, 164n40,  
173, 174, 194, 196, 198,  
203–205, 214n43, 214n44, 245,  
275, 276, 281, 287n1

Ethics, 6, 243, 273–287

Evaristo, Bernardine, 263n30

## F

Family, 4, 5, 7, 8, 15–17, 19, 21–24,  
27, 29, 32, 36–38, 40, 42–43n9,  
43n10, 43n11, 43n12, 46n30,  
48n39, 48n41, 49n46, 71, 72,  
78, 85–87, 93, 104–107, 109n5,  
110n10, 124–127, 129–134,  
137, 140, 142–144, 156–158,  
159n4, 160n11, 163n27,  
166n50, 173–177, 179, 182,  
183, 185, 186, 188–197,  
201–204, 207, 208n7, 210n19,  
211n24, 212n29, 212n31,  
212n33, 213n35, 215n52, 232,  
234–237, 239, 240, 244, 245,

247, 251, 253, 254, 258,  
262n23, 262n26, 264n36, 275,  
277, 280, 286, 287, 288n3

Family of man, 5, 7, 8, 18

Feeling, 3, 5–25, 27, 29, 35–37, 39,  
40, 42n6, 42n9, 43n10, 43n11,  
43n14, 45n24, 47n34, 48n39,  
48n41, 49n43, 50–51n49,  
51n50, 52n57, 53n64, 54n67,  
55n71, 69–71, 85, 89, 95, 101,  
103–108, 115n46, 123–126,  
131, 132, 134–137, 142,  
149–152, 155, 156, 158,  
160n9, 161n19, 162n21,  
164n40, 165n41, 173, 174,  
176, 177, 179–186, 189–191,  
193, 195, 197–201, 205, 207,  
211n24, 212n33, 213n38,  
215n47, 223, 225, 226, 228,  
233–235, 237, 238, 242, 245,  
246, 251, 273–277, 279, 280,  
287, 288n2

Feminism, 178, 209n13

Focalization, 25, 52n57, 84, 91, 173,  
175, 213n34

Foucault, Michel, 8, 22, 31, 39,  
47n33, 49n41, 212n32

French Revolution, 9, 12, 180

## G

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr, 5, 34, 88, 89,  
91, 99, 113n34

Genette, Gérard, 25, 55n71

Gikandi, Simon, 5, 12, 38, 42n7, 242,  
243, 264n41

Gilroy, Paul, 12, 45n24, 93, 96, 127,  
160n8, 165n43, 214n39,  
273, 288n2

Gordon riots, 125, 128, 129, 131, 133

Great chain of being, 44n18, 163n28

Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw,  
53n61, 114n41

**H**

Habermas, Jürgen, 27, 28  
 Haitian Revolution, 12, 105  
 Hartman, Saidiya, 37, 111n12, 201,  
 274, 277–280, 283, 287, 289n10  
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich,  
 12, 45n25  
 Himid, Lubaina, 274, 284–287  
*Histoire croisée*, 11  
*Homo economicus*, 69, 77, 100, 263n35  
 Hume, David, 34, 87, 150, 159n4  
 Hybridity, 55n69, 85, 90, 198

**I**

Imagined communities, 8, 23  
 Imitation, 100, 101, 125, 138,  
 151, 164n38  
 Imperialism, 31–33, 35, 42n8, 48n37,  
 52n57, 91, 175, 187, 212n30,  
 224, 253, 259n7  
 Inchbald, Elizabeth, 184  
 Industrial revolution, 8  
 International Slavery Museum,  
 Liverpool, 2, 275

**J**

Jacobite Rebellion, 201  
 Jacobs, Harriet A., 48n39  
 James, Henry, 208n6  
 Jefferson, Thomas, 150, 151  
 Judges' Lodgings Museum, 286

**K**

Knight, Joseph, 215n48  
 Kotzebue, August von, 185

**L**

Levy, Andrea, 289n11  
 Linebaugh, Peter, 11, 194, 204, 214n40

**M**

Mackenzie, Henry, 9, 95, 124, 159n1  
 Mansfield, William Murray, First Earl  
 of, 14, 46n30, 129, 178, 179  
 May, Theresa, 2  
 McClintock, Anne, 23, 54n66  
 Melville, Herman, 37  
 Methodism, 9, 98, 214n45  
 Mill, John Stuart, 49n47  
 Mimic man, 90, 151, 152  
 Mimicry, 55n69, 87, 90, 126, 151  
 Monogenesis, 44n18, 54n67, 163n28  
 Montagu, Mary Wortley Lady, 159n4  
 Mood, 36, 55n71, 186  
 Morant Bay Rebellion, 265n46  
 More, Hannah, 15, 178  
 Morrison, Toni, 160n8  
 Mrs Jellyby (fictional character), 40,  
 225, 234, 235, 237, 240  
 Muñoz, José Esteban, 284

**N**

Napoleonic Wars, 207n2  
 Neo-slave narrative, 289n11  
 New Imperialism, 3, 24, 259n7  
 Ngai, Sianne, 4, 35–37, 51n50, 282  
 Nightingale, Florence, 250,  
 264n42, 266n49  
 Noble savage, 106, 112n21, 233

**P**

Philanthropy, 16, 40, 47n33, 140,  
 141, 156, 223, 225, 236, 237,  
 239, 251, 257, 262n27  
 Philip, M. NourbeSe, 45n23  
 Phillips, Caryl, 160n11, 289n11  
 Picaro/picaresque, 24, 88, 100, 104,  
 115n43, 242  
 Plagiarism, 165n42  
 Polygenesis, 44n18, 54n67, 163n28  
 Postcolonial literature, 31

Postcolonial studies, 4, 34  
 Prince, Mary, 46n33, 53n61  
 Providence, 72, 100, 110n8, 135,  
 142–144, 162n21, 247

## Q

Queer theory, 6, 37

## R

Race, 7, 39, 47n34, 48n38, 53n64,  
 54n67, 70, 72, 73, 80, 81, 90,  
 106, 107, 108n1, 110–111n10,  
 160n7, 174, 205, 211n21,  
 211n24, 213n35, 223, 227, 233,  
 235, 237, 240, 244, 248,  
 266n46, 266n48, 288n1  
 Realism, 3, 25, 28, 39, 69–72, 85, 87,  
 109n5, 174, 225, 239, 276  
 Rediker, Marcus, 11, 194,  
 204, 214n40  
 Reform, 3, 9, 24, 40, 46n31, 47n33,  
 50n48, 176, 183, 191, 195,  
 225–228, 233, 234, 236, 240,  
 258, 262n27, 276  
 Richardson, Samuel, 24, 40, 49n44,  
 51n52, 124, 125, 154, 210n16  
 Richetti, John, 26, 27, 81–83, 91  
 Rise of the novel, 4, 6, 9, 24–33, 38,  
 52n56, 69, 70, 110n6, 152, 225  
 Robertson, James, 215n48  
 Romance, 11, 25, 26, 29, 51n55,  
 52n59, 85, 99, 100, 126, 156,  
 175, 201, 243  
 Rozema, Patricia, 211n26  
 Rushdie, Salman, 263n30

## S

Said, Edward W., 5, 7, 31–34, 36,  
 52n57, 54n67, 175, 177, 178,  
 183, 186, 187, 208n8, 208n9,

209n12, 209n13, 209n14,  
 210n18, 210n19, 210n20, 212n30  
 Sancho, Ignatius, 4, 6, 10, 17, 19, 27,  
 36, 38–41, 42n7, 88, 108,  
 110n6, 123–158, 173, 174, 194,  
 198, 203, 205, 242, 275,  
 276, 287n1  
 Scott, Sarah, 54n67, 124,  
 159n1, 159n4  
 Seacole, Mary, 4, 6, 10, 23, 38, 40,  
 41, 88, 91, 102, 106, 107, 128,  
 132, 139, 161n16, 196, 198,  
 203, 205, 211n24, 212n27,  
 223–258, 275, 276, 287n1  
 Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, 157, 282–284  
 Sentimentalism, 3, 9, 16, 17, 19, 21,  
 23, 39, 42n9, 43n10, 44n17,  
 47n34, 48n39, 95, 105, 110n6,  
 123–125, 135, 142, 144,  
 149–153, 155–157, 174, 180,  
 181, 195, 199, 204,  
 215–216n53, 225, 236, 239, 281  
 Sentimentality, 16, 19, 21, 37, 90,  
 101, 109n5, 151, 156, 158, 204,  
 236, 252  
 Sepoy Rebellion/Indian Mutiny, 4,  
 24, 224, 254, 288n6  
 Seven Years' War, 46n29, 97, 148  
 Shakespeare, William, 111n13, 137,  
 163n30, 198, 199, 203  
 Sharp, Granville, 14, 45n22,  
 147, 163n31  
 Slave narrative, 88, 90, 99, 216n53,  
 263n35, 280  
 Slavery, 70, 123, 173, 224, 274  
*See also* Enslavement  
 Slave trade, 1–4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16,  
 20, 41n2, 44n17, 46n27, 46n29,  
 47n36, 48n37, 87, 89, 102, 134,  
 144, 147, 174, 175, 177, 179,  
 180, 186–188, 199, 209n12,  
 210n20, 257, 259n7, 260n15,  
 273, 276, 277, 286, 288n4

Smith, Adam, 16, 19  
 Smollet, Tobias, 166n49  
 Snelgrave, William, 92  
 Social Darwinism, 44n18, 265n46  
 Somerset case, 14, 90, 215n48  
 Somerset, James, 14  
 Soubise, Julius, 125, 137, 138, 157  
 Spillers, Hortense, 91, 215n52  
 Sterne, Laurence, 6, 10, 17, 26, 36,  
     39–41, 108, 110n6, 123–158,  
     173, 174, 180–182, 205, 231,  
     261n17, 276  
 Stone, Lawrence, 7, 8, 17, 24,  
     43n10, 131  
 Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 259n5

## T

Tacky's Rebellion, 13  
 Talking book trope, 99  
 Thackeray, William Makepeace,  
     31, 49n46  
 Thirteenth Amendment, 20  
 Todd, Janet, 9, 26, 46n32, 180  
 Tonality, 4–6, 15, 23, 30–41, 51n50,  
     53n61, 55n71, 55n73, 71, 90,  
     104, 108, 109n5, 124, 125, 138,  
     139, 141–143, 149, 152, 155,  
     156, 158, 164n39, 173, 175,  
     192, 193, 205, 207, 215n47,  
     224, 225, 239, 244, 254,  
     260n11, 276, 280, 282, 285  
     *See also* Tone  
 Tone, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 23, 26, 35, 36,  
     40, 55n71, 55n73, 70, 71, 81,  
     87, 94, 95, 110n6, 113n29, 125,  
     126, 128, 130, 131, 133, 138,  
     139, 155, 157, 158, 161n18,  
     162n19, 163n26, 165n44, 174,  
     182, 193, 195–197, 203–205,

    207n4, 225–228, 232, 233, 238,  
     242, 244, 251, 257, 260n11,  
     276, 282  
     *See also* Tonality  
 Travelogue, 40, 71, 223, 225, 226,  
     229, 231, 232, 234, 238,  
     240–242, 252, 254, 257, 259n8  
 Treaty of Utrecht, 46n29, 147  
 Trickster, 34, 90  
 Trollope, Anthony, 254, 255, 266n48

## W

Walcott, Derek, 112n23  
 Walvin, James, 3, 12, 13, 45n22  
 Watt, Ian, 4, 25–28, 30, 31, 33,  
     51n52, 51n54, 53n64, 54n67,  
     69, 71, 77  
 Wedderburn, Robert, 4–6, 8, 10, 15,  
     23, 36, 38–41, 46n28, 49n46,  
     88, 94, 107, 128, 132, 133, 139,  
     158, 160n11, 165n42, 173–207,  
     263–264n36, 276, 289n8  
 Wedgwood medallion, 18, 90, 107,  
     132, 235, 285, 286  
 Wheatley, Phillis, 150  
 Whitehead, Colson, 289n11  
 Wilberforce, William, 13, 50n48, 142,  
     196, 199, 214n43, 214n46, 275  
 Williams, Francis, 34, 87, 159n4  
 Williams, Raymond, 5, 7, 36, 207n4  
 Windrush generation, 2, 3  
 Wollstonecraft, Mary, 14, 105, 178  
 World War II, 2, 3, 273  
 Writing back, 4, 31, 32, 37, 71, 138,  
     151, 152, 243, 277, 279

## Z

*Zong* case, 14